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## The Time Meddlers

### Prologue

This story begins with a different version of Deathly Hallows where everything went wrong. It contains spoilers from that book, and if you haven't read it, you'll probably be confused during the prologue, but it shouldn't be necessary to have read it to understand the rest of this story. Much of this prologue is summary, although during the course of this story I may do flashbacks of the scenes that I'm only skimming over here. The main story begins after this.

"Hagrid?" Harry desperately pleaded as he struggled out of the debris caused by the crash of Sirius' old bike. He'd been leaving the Dursleys for the last time using a strategy of six Polyjuiced doubles of himself traveling with different guards. Harry's guard was Hagrid, and they'd crash-landed. Hedwig had already been killed in transit, hit by a stray Avada Kedavra. The Boy-Who-Lived was bleeding from his head as he walked out of the muddy water toward the large figure lying on the ground.

Harry had to swallow down the bile that was rising in his throat at the horrid sight that greeted him. The bloody form of his first friend was sprawled out on the grass with a large, sharp piece of wood sticking out of his chest. He'd been impaled when he landed on the wrong spot – right on top of an old wooden fence.

"Ha...rry," the dying half-giant struggled to say as tears began forming in the Chosen One's eyes.

"I'm here," Harry managed to say while kneeling beside Rubeus. He was blinking rapidly to avoid crying.

"I'm...sorry I couldn' carry ye all the way." Hagrid's eyes went dark as his body went limp.

"No! Hagrid!" shouted Harry as tears began falling down his cheeks.

The nearly-seventeen-year-old boy blinked and found himself just outside the Burrow with Hermione, Remus and Ginny. Suddenly, a broom materialized above them and streaked toward the ground. Tonks landed in a long skid that sent earth and pebbles everywhere, but the other passenger of the portkey, a tall, young man with red hair, fell flat on his face.

“Ron!” shouted Hermione and Ginny as they ran toward the limp figure. Harry was watching in shock.

“I’m so sorry,” said Tonks, who Harry noticed was crying. “Bellatrix got him with a killing curse, and I couldn’t leave his body behind.

Hermione started trembling and fell to her knees. As Harry walked toward her, he felt tears beginning to drop from his eyes yet again on this horrible night. He knelt between Hermione and Ginny, putting an arm around each girl’s shoulder, as they mourned together for yet another loss on this awful day.

Harry blinked again and found himself standing with Hermione and Neville as a bright white weasel speaking in Arthur Weasley’s voice informed them of Charlie’s death.

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The images kept coming faster and faster, making Harry relive the worst moments of the past year as he slept.

He saw Umbridge, who he’d stunned earlier, Avada Kedavra Arthur Weasley from behind on the day Harry, Neville and Hermione broke into the Ministry to steal a Horcrux from Delores. Harry had decided to free some muggle-borns that the former Grand Inquisitor had been interrogating. It was yet another death Harry could blame himself for. That was the day Harry learned that stunning his enemies only allowed them to kill more people. He Reducto’d Umbridge in the head, killing her while she was still celebrating Arthur’s death.

Harry then found himself reading issues of the Daily Prophet that Hermione had managed to acquire at different points while they traveled the countryside. One described how the Weasleys were all

slaughtered as blood-traitors; another said the same thing about the Lovegoods. When both Parvati Patil and Cho Chang were also killed, Harry realized that every girl he'd dated had been targeted and was now dead. That issue declared that all of the former staff of Hogwarts, with the exception of Snape – the new headmaster – had been murdered while trying to stop other students from being killed. Of course, the Prophet presented it as justice instead of the horrifying holocaust that it really was. Another issue said that Remus and his pregnant wife, Tonks, had also been killed, praising the Ministry for its battle against werewolves and their mates.

As his nightmare continued, he found himself in Malfoy Manor watching Neville kill Bellatrix Lestrange just before getting sectumsempra'd in the back by a terrified Draco Malfoy. Dobby, who came to rescue them, grabbed Harry, Hermione, and the dying Neville and apparated them out of his former home while being stabbed from behind by Lucius Malfoy, his former owner.

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"Harry," a voice called the Boy-Who-Lived out of the dream world and into his living nightmare. "Harry!"

He opened his eyes to see the blurry image of his one companion through this whole ordeal. He had a hard time not crying as he remembered that the bushy-haired young woman was the only friend he had left in the world. She gently placed his glasses on his face so he could focus his eyes. As he gazed at her, he realized, not for the first time, that she was very beautiful. While mourning Neville's death, Harry and Hermione had grown closer and admitted to having romantic feelings for each other. At first, Harry had tried to deny his feelings to protect her, but she pointed out that she was already wanted dead for her association with him whether she enjoyed the benefits or not.

"Good morning, love," responded Harry with a small grin.

She smiled and gave him a small kiss before telling him that, "The potion is ready," with a serious expression.

His face took on a grim expression as he said, "Very well. I guess today is the day."

They'd spent the past few months, when they weren't kissing, learning as much magic as possible. Harry, Hermione and Neville had started working on becoming Animagi shortly after they'd left the Burrow, but none had achieved a transformation until about a month after Neville died. Now, both Harry and Hermione could transform into an animal, for all the good it would do them. The potion that was finally ready, however, was what they believed the only chance to win the war. It was a desperate measure, but these were desperate times.

While researching some books she had taken from Grimmauld Place while they were living there, Hermione came across a difficult potion that allowed you to send your mind and soul back in your own body a specific number of birthdays. One of its ingredient's amounts determined the number of birthdays to go back. They chose seven. Once it's ingested, the traveler would have one hour to activate it. The only way to activate it would be to die. If it's not activated, the drinker would die anyway but not travel back in time. The same thing would happen if the potion wasn't made exactly right.

Harry and Hermione decided that this world would hardly be worth living in even if Voldemort was defeated. They decided that both of them would go back in time to change things, because neither wanted to be left alone in this world. The only way to know that it worked was that after the drinker's death, their body would disappear.

Hermione sighed. "Do you have the note ready?"

He nodded as he pulled a small roll of parchment from the end table beside him. After their escape from Malfoy manor, they'd been sleeping under the stars for a few days before they ran across an abandoned cabin. Hermione had managed to put it under the Fidelius Charm with Harry as the Secret-Keeper, which proved to them that nobody owned it. Her research had indicated that if someone rightfully owned property, then only that owner could perform the charm. However, if no one owned it, then anybody could hide it with that spell. The condition of the cabin indicated that no one had set foot in it for a hundred years. However, they had quickly managed to

repair everything with magic, even fashioning their own bathroom that used spells instead of plumbing.

Hermione tied Harry's note to an owl they'd managed to catch while it was delivering a letter. They'd seen it flying with a note tied to its leg and Harry summoned it. Hermione had been angry about that until she saw that the note was a report on finding more mudbloods to round up. The note Harry had written simply said:

Hey Tommy-boy,

I just thought I'd let you know that I destroyed all your Horcruxes except Nagini.

Have a good day.

Harry Potter

The idea behind this note was to get Riddle to think about where his Horcruxes were located and hope that Harry would be able to read his mind through their link to get that information before they went back in time.

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About an hour after the owl was sent to Voldemort, Harry grabbed his scar as he sank to the floor in agony. Hermione watched helplessly as he cried out in pain. Finally, he spoke. "Killed the messenger who...gave the letter. Protect Nagini! Checking Gaunt house...for ring."

She watched him scream in agony just before saying, "Mad...ring gone! Checking cave for locket."

About fifty minutes later, Harry screamed as blood started dripping from his scar, "Gringotts or Hogwarts? Both secure. I'll have Bella check her vault for me while I go to Hogwarts...Ahhhh scar hurts!"

"That's enough!" said Hermione as she pulled Harry into her arms. "Close your mind. We've learned enough. You were right about

Bellatrix's vault, and we now know that the last one is in Hogwarts. That should be enough information."

He slowly opened his eyes and focused on Hermione. "You're right." He took a deep breath. "If...if something goes wrong, I want you to know that." He took a deep breath and looked her in the eyes. "I love you."

She smiled at him before saying, "I love you, too," and kissing him.

When they separated, Harry said, "Alright. Do you have the injections ready?"

She grimly nodded. "Yes. Once we've swallowed the potions, we should be able to, to kill ourselves quickly and painlessly."

"Aside from the needle," he added.

She sighed. "Unavoidable."

She went to another room and came back with a tray containing two glasses of a foul-smelling, dark green liquid and two medical needles. After setting the tray down, she handed Harry one of the glasses and took the other for herself. "To second chances."

Harry grinned and tapped her glass with his. "To second chances." They both forced themselves to drink the entire contents in one gulp, because they knew they'd never get themselves to subject their taste buds to it again.

Hermione then took the two needles and handed one to her beloved. "Do you remember how to find a vein?"

He nodded before slowly stabbing the needle into his left forearm as she did the same. He winced but managed to keep a steady hand. "That wasn't so bad," he commented.

"Yeah," she replied.

He then emptied the poisonous contents of the needle and removed it. He looked up to see she'd done the same. The poison was very fast-acting and he could feel his vision fading as he became very sleepy. Harry pulled his love into an embrace and whispered in her ear, "I want to die in your arms, Hermione."

"Me, too," she said. It was the last thing Harry heard before passing out. A moment later, Hermione fell forward as Harry disappeared. Exactly five seconds after that, she vanished.

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Harry found himself lying face-down on the ground. After listening for a moment, he determined that he was completely alone, so he got up. After a minute, he realized he was naked, but wasn't concerned about that because he was alone. He also realized that he was still seventeen years old instead of eleven.

He suddenly heard a noise and felt embarrassed, wishing he was wearing clothing. He saw a white robe appear in front of him and grabbed it, quickly putting it on. He then followed the noise that sounded like a wounded animal until he heard a voice behind him.

"Harry?" He would recognize the voice of his beloved anywhere. The voice that had encouraged him to be the best person he could be for the past seven years sounded unsure.

He turned around to face her, noticing that she was wearing a similar robe to his. "Hermione, I'm glad you're here with me, but do you have any idea where here is?"

She looked down. "I, I wonder if something went wrong, but, but I saw you disappear. I..."

"I must admit that I am surprised that you both arrived in the manner in which you did," came a voice neither had heard for about a year. They turned to see Albus Dumbledore standing before them. He had a neutral expression on his face, and Harry noticed that both of his hands were uninjured.

“Are we dead?” asked Hermione. “Did the potion fail?”

Shaking his head, the aged wizard answered, “No, the potion did not fail, and you are not dead. However, we are at what could be regarded as a crossroads, where death and life can meet.” He turned his attention to Harry. “You have inadvertently done a very good thing. You see, I had instructed Severus...”

“SNAPE!!!” growled Harry angrily. “He murdered you!”

“My dear boy, I’m afraid that you do not have all the relevant information.”

“What?” he asked, confused, while Hermione looked like a light had turned on in her mind.

“It was part of your plan,” she stated, and now Albus did smile. “But...how could you plan your own death?”

“To the well-organized mind, death is...”

“The next great adventure,” completed Harry. “But...”

“In addition to delaying young Malfoy’s career as a murderer, in hopes of preventing it, it also provided a merciful end to my own suffering.” He paused for a moment before saying, “I was dying from the injury that destroyed my hand. It would’ve been extremely painful. That way I was able to...”

“Die with dignity,” completed Hermione.

“Yes, Miss Granger.” He turned back to Harry as the groaning of the other form grew louder. “As I was saying before we got side-tracked, Harry, Headmaster Snape was supposed to inform you that your scar contained a piece of Voldemort’s soul...”

“A Horcrux?” asked Harry in fright. Hermione put her hand over her mouth in surprise.



“Yes,” he nodded, “although I didn’t tell Severus that’s what it was. In any case, he was to tell you that you must allow yourself to die. If you did that, I believed that it would destroy the Horcrux, as it has.” He gestured toward the hideous form that was still making noise. Harry began staring at it until Dumbledore cleared his throat. “I had planned for you to allow Voldemort to kill you. I believe that the fact that you share blood would allow you to live. However, you have found a different way to sacrifice your life and live. You will not have the Horcrux when you return to your younger body. That means you will not have a connection with Voldemort, nor will you speak Parseltongue.”

“Small price to pay,” muttered Harry. Hermione nodded in agreement.

The former headmaster’s face became harsh. “I must say that I’m surprised that you, Miss Granger, would be part of this scheme. You know the laws of time travel; terrible things happen when time is meddled with. I wouldn’t be surprised if you make things worse.”

“How can they be?” asked Harry sarcastically. “Everyone we care about is dead.”

Gravely, Albus replied, “I hope you do not find out the answer to that question.”

“We know who follows Voldemort and where they are. We also know where the Horcruxes are. What could go wrong?” asked the Boy-Who-Lived.

“Now you’ve scared me, Harry,” said Hermione nervously.

“I must say that I am disappointed, Harry, that you took a Slytherin’s way out instead of facing Voldemort like a Gryffindor,” said Dumbledore sadly.

Harry’s face hardened. “I’m not being a coward! Everyone’s always let Riddle dictate the conditions of his fights. Now, I’m facing Voldemort on my terms – not his!”

Hermione added, "He's done too much damage already! Not just our loved ones – everyone's loved ones! There was no way to break into Gringotts or Hogwarts anyway!"

Suddenly, Harry realized something. "This was all according to your plan, wasn't it? You planned for both the Ministry and Hogwarts to fall without a fight. You could've told Scrimgeour the name of every Death Eater at the Ministry! Even if he didn't believe you, the Order members who worked at the Ministry could've exposed or even killed them! Instead, you set him up to die!" Dumbledore looked down, unable to face Harry. "You could've sent notes to every parent not to send their kids to Hogwarts before you died, or had McGonagall do it afterward, but instead you did nothing!"

"I had hoped that Severus would've been able to prevent the deaths..."

"So, that was your great plan? To have Snape as headmaster to make sure students were only tortured and taught to be Death Eaters instead of killed!"

Still, unable to face Harry, Albus said, "I suppose that it does sound..."

"And while we're at it, why didn't you train me to fight, and to detect magical traps? You took an entire year to tell me something that would've only taken a few hours to explain!" He took a deep breath. "You knew you wouldn't be able to train me anymore after the year, but you chose to leave me not knowing how to fight Voldemort, hoping that my luck would hold. I can't believe..."

"Harry," said Hermione gently as she put a hand on his shoulder. He began calming down immediately.

"I must say," said Albus, "that I'm glad that you found love, although I was surprised that it was with Miss Granger."

Harry calmly replied, "It took me until I had no one else left to realize how wonderful she is." He took a deep breath. "I'm sorry I yelled at you, sir. I'm sure you had your reasons."

"I did indeed," said Dumbledore, "but I can see that I made several mistakes and you had the right to be angry. I almost wish that I could travel through time to take back some of my worst errors." Sighing, he continued, "I wish you both the best of luck with your time-meddling, and do hope that things work out for the best. Good day."

Harry blinked and suddenly heard something large pounding on a door. He looked around to see he was on the floor in a hut and Dudley Dursley was lying on a couch nearby with a terrified expression on his face.

Uncle Vernon came skidding into the room, holding a rifle in his hands. He swallowed and said in a soft, frightened voice, "Who's there? I warn you – I'm armed!"

There was a pause. Then – SMASH!

The door fell down to reveal an enormous man with a large beard who said in a friendly voice, "Sorry about that."

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Please review.

## Chapter One – Diagon Alley

It took all the force of will Harry had in him not to run straight up to Hagrid and hug him tightly. As it was, he had to blink back tears of joy at seeing his first friend. He quickly got up and nearly lost his balance. He was used to being much taller and was a bit disoriented with his younger body. He grinned as the half-giant picked up the door and put it back in its frame. Harry couldn't resist being the first one to speak as he took a step forward.

"Hello, sir," he said politely. "Might I enquire what your name is?"

"I don't care who you are, sir!" shouted Vernon, enraged. "You are breaking and entering. If you do not leave at once, I shall be forced to fire upon you!"

Hagrid seemed to have not heard the overweight muggle as he responded to Harry's question. "There yah are, Harry. It's good ta' see yah again. I haven't seen yah fer ten years. Yah was just a baby, so I understand yah not rememberin' me. My name is Rubeus Hagrid, Keeper of Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts."

"GET OUT!!!" shouted Vernon Dursley, now pointing his rifle at Hagrid, who simply reached out and grabbed it and tied it in a knot, dropping it on the floor with a clatter. Harry's uncle seemed to shrink upon this turn of events and backed away.

The Boy-Who-Lived looked like he was remembering something. "Hogwarts? Isn't that the place where all those letters that Uncle Vernon keeps taking from me and burning are coming from?"

"Burning them?" snarled Hagrid as he glared at the Dursleys. Vernon looked like he was about to pass out from fear. He turned his attention back to Harry. "Yes. They're from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

"He will NOT be going!" Vernon interrupted again, apparently having found his courage once more.

“And I suppose a great muggle like yourself is gonna stop him?” questioned Hagrid sarcastically.

Harry then allowed Hagrid to explain all about him being a wizard like before. Hagrid even gave him the cake as a birthday present, which Harry purposely let Dudley steal so that once more, his cousin would grow a pigtail. Harry laughed even harder this time. The next morning, they took off together for Diagon Alley, where Harry had a few plans on how to begin changing history.

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Since he didn't want Hagrid to get suspicious, Harry did his best to act exactly as he had the first time as they rode the train into London and walked into the Leaky Cauldron. He even happily put up with the fuss made over him at the pub, with everybody shaking his hands. It was hard for him to stop himself from killing Quirrel right there, but he had other plans for him. Harry found it quite easy to pretend to be in awe of Diagon Alley, since he hadn't seen it like this for nearly five years – when he spent a week there after blowing up Aunt Marge. He didn't make it back again until after Voldemort's return had been made public, and it just wasn't the same after that.

He quietly walked into Gringotts with his companion, and let him do the talking as he wondered why Dumbledore would have Hagrid pick up the Philosopher's Stone in front of a student. Whatever the reason, it didn't matter this time because Harry already knew how he'd handle that. He did, however, ask to have a bit of his gold converted to muggle money, “So I'll have a bit of spending money.” Hagrid didn't object to that, since it was just a small amount. Once they left the bank, Hagrid left Harry alone at Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions, and Harry was about to meet Draco Malfoy for the first time – again.

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While they were being measured for robes, Harry let his first conversation with Draco go the way it had until he asked about his parents, to which Harry replied, “They're dead.”

“Oh, sorry,” said Draco, not sounding sorry at all. “But they were our kind, weren’t they?”

“They were English, if that’s what you mean,” said Harry, purposely misunderstanding.

“I mean if they were a witch and wizard,” said Draco, sounding irritated.

“Oh,” replied Harry. “No, they were what you call muggles. Very impolite word, if you ask me.”

Suddenly, a sneer found its place on Malfoy’s face. “Oh, you’re a mudblood,” he said nastily.

Keeping a neutral expression, Harry asked, “What’s that mean?”

“It means that you’re filthy because you don’t have any pure wizarding blood in your veins, and don’t belong in this world.” Sniffing the air, he put on a sour expression. “I thought I smelled something foul.”

Harry burst out laughing. “You sound just like that crazy muggle, Adolf Hitler, only for him it was Jews. That’s probably where that madman Voldemort got his ideas. I read about him. He started getting power just after Hitler died.”

“The Dark Lord did not get his ideas from a muggle!” shouted Draco as his face turned pink. “And how DARE you speak his name! He was powerful and...”

“...was defeated by a baby,” completed Harry while still laughing at Malfoy, who stormed off angrily. Harry continued laughing. He’d quite enjoyed himself. He wondered how Draco would react when he found out he’d lied about his identity and parentage.

When his robes were completed, Harry left the shop to find that Hagrid had bought him an ice cream cone, which he happily accepted. From there, they went to Flourish and Blotts and the other shops where he needed school supplies. Once again, Hagrid bought

Hedwig as another birthday present. Finally, they reached Ollivander's, where it took just as long as before for the brother to Voldemort's wand to choose Harry. After they finished there, Hagrid put Harry on the train home. However, that's not where Harry went.

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At the first stop the train made, Harry got off. He took Hedwig out of her cage and said, "I live at Number Four, Privet Drive, in Little Whinging. Can you fly there and wait in a nearby tree for me to return?"

The owl looked insulted at him questioning her like that.

"Alright, I know you're brilliant and shouldn't question you, girl. I have a feeling that we're going to be very good friends, Hedwig." The owl looked confused. "Oh, I'd like to call you Hedwig if that's alright. I think it's a beautiful name for a beautiful owl." She nodded her approval. "I probably won't be back until tomorrow morning," he commented, and the snowy owl flew off.

He managed to get the cage into his trunk and found a second-hand shop, where he bought a hooded cloak that he could completely cover himself with using the muggle money he'd gotten at Gringotts. That way, no one in the magical community would be able to tell if he were a boy, an elf, or a goblin so they should leave him alone. After finding a deserted alley, he put on the cloak and summoned the Knight Bus. After a bumpy ride, he found himself back at the Leaky Cauldron.

Keeping his cloak tight, Harry walked up to the bartender with his trunk. Disguising his voice, he said, "Can I get a room here, tonight?"

"Sure," said Tom. "There are rooms available. It'll be nine Sickles."

After Harry paid the man and stored his school trunk in his room, he hurried to Gringotts, hoping he wasn't too late. He found the bank still open, but without as many customers. He walked up to the teller and pulled back his hood just enough to reveal his scar to the goblin. He then handed him a note he'd written that told them that a dark wizard

was planning to attempt robbing Vault 713. It said that he knew the vault had been emptied earlier, but that they should catch the fool that would try to break into Gringotts and make him face Goblin justice. "Could you make sure that a manager gets this?" The goblin nodded, looking at him appraisingly. "I'd also like to get more money out of my vault."

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After Harry had gotten a great deal more money (both magical and muggle) out of his vault and put it in a bottomless bag he'd purchased there, he headed straight to Knockturn Alley, with his wand up his sleeve for easy access – just in case. He didn't plan on using magic until he had a chance to practice because he wasn't sure if he'd have to relearn spell work or not, but he did want to be able to defend himself. In any case, his disguise did get people who would not have feared a little boy to avoid him. The first place he came to was a broken down wooden building that looked like it should be condemned. The rather faded sign said Wendelin's Wands. He opened the door and entered.

A silky, sinister voice greeted him almost immediately. "I'm Wendelin. May I help you?"

Harry looked at the woman behind the counter. Her complexion was almost completely pale and her eyes pale green. Her long hair looked like it had been died black. Harry couldn't tell her age. She was wearing a black, pointy hat and black robes. On the counter, he saw two boxes. One was filled with little sticks while the other seemed to contain magical cores. What he assumed to be a dragon heartstring was at the top.

"Yes," he said with a disguised voice. "I would like a wand and an invisible wrist holster for it."

"The wand will cost a hundred Galleons, and the wrist holster twenty. Are you sure you have enough? I don't take kindly to people who have me make a wand and don't pay me for it." She was looking very threatening, although her voice was still eerily silky.



Harry replied, "Don't worry. I've got the money, but it had better be a top-quality wand."

"Absolutely the best. Much better than anything that fraud Ollivander can make, let me tell you." She then indicated the box of sticks. "Now, put your hand over that box while saying, mei talea."

Nervously, he did as she said. It was then that he noticed that both of the boxes were seemingly bottomless, and had more materials inside them than he could count. As soon as the word, "Talea," left his lips, one of the sticks from deep inside started making its way up until it finally shot straight into his hand. His Seeker skills immediately came into play and he caught it.

"Yew," she said as she took the stick from him. "Now, do the same thing with the core substances, except that you say, mei ortus." He complied and soon he was holding a, "Horntail Dragon heartstring," in his hands, but it wasn't the one from the top. This specific one had obviously climbed a long way up. Wendelin then put the stick in Harry's left hand while the heartstring was still in his right. He felt a strange surge of magic in his hands for a moment before she grabbed both pieces out of his hands. "Yes, they'll work together. I'll have the wand ready in an hour. Bye."

Realizing that she wanted him to leave for the moment, he turned around and walked out the door and headed to his next destination, which was in Diagon Alley. He noticed that it was getting dark as he approached Bernard's Custom Trunks, still wearing his disguise.

"Hello," said the man inside. "How may I help you?"

"I'd like a custom trunk. I'll need it to have multiple compartments, one of which should be a comfortable apartment. I also need it to shrink for easy carrying without having to perform a spell."

"I think I have just what you need, but it'll be very expensive. About five hundred Galleons."

"That's fine," said Harry, grabbing a handful of coins out of his bag to prove he had it.

“Alright,” he said, pointing at a black trunk that looked like it had just been polished. “This is our latest top-of-the-line model. The trunk always weighs ten pounds in trunk form. It has nine different, magically expanded compartments. It’s got a furnished apartment. It can always be opened from the inside so you can’t be trapped in it.

“If security is important to you, let me tell you that it has a very secure locking system that can be controlled from the inside to make sure no unauthorized person can get the trunk open.” With a wicked grin, he added, “They get hit with a strong stinging hex if they try.” Harry grinned, although the shopkeeper couldn’t see his face. “The trunk also can be disillusioned and stuck to its location. It can also be shrunk to a wristwatch that displays the time and has an alarm that only the wearer can hear. The watch, like the trunk, is magically impervious to water, physical damage, and most spells.

“There’s a clock inside the trunk apartment that acts and looks like a large version of the watch head and a view screen of the outside in the furnished living room that looks like a muggle telly with audio to hear outside. I actually got the design from muggle televisions – but you use a wand instead of a remote control to turn it on and adjust the volume. A large bookshelf inside the apartment has available access also as one of the compartments in the trunk. The other compartments are closets in the apartment. It has a kitchen furnished with muggle-like appliances that work on magic. The refrigerator has a cooling charm, but the ‘freezer’ isn’t cold. Instead, it actually has preserving charms that could keep food fresh for up to a year.”

“That sounds perfect!” Harry declared.

With a wink, the shopkeeper added, “Magic inside is undetectable, so any illegal spells or underage magic can be done inside it without alerting the Ministry.”

Harry paid for the trunk, and had to donate a drop of blood for a security spell that was put on the trunk. When he put it on his wrist, he saw that he still had twenty minutes until his wand would be ready, so he took a little stroll to Borgin and Burkes.

“May I help you,” asked the owner in his oily voice.

“Yes,” Harry, still in his cloak, replied in his fake voice as he stepped inside. “I would like to buy that cabinet,” he said, indicating the vanishing cabinet that had later brought a group of Death Eaters into Hogwarts and contributed to the headmaster’s death – NOT THIS TIME!

Borgin shrugged his shoulders indifferently. “That’s been here for a long time. It’ll be good to get rid of it. I’ll let it go for only a thousand Galleons.”

“I’ll bet you don’t even know where the matching one is – if it even exists,” replied Harry. “I’ll give you five hundred Galleons.”

“I won’t take a Knut less than nine hundred!” he replied icily.

“I guess you want to keep it here for another twenty years. How many offers have you had on that in the last ten years?”

Borgin’s feet shifted on the floor as he said, “Many people have looked at it...”

“...and never offered to take it off your hands,” Harry replied confidently.

Looking upset, the shopkeeper said, “Fine. Five hundred Galleons.”

“It’s a deal,” said Harry happily.

He then counted the money out of his bottomless bag and handed it to Borgin, who took it greedily before saying, “It can’t be shrunk, and I’m not delivering it.”

“You don’t need to,” said Harry as he took off his watch. He laid it on the floor, touched it and said, “Trunk.” The shopkeeper seemed mildly surprised to see the watch morph into a full-size trunk. Harry then opened up one of the compartments. “Would you mind giving me a hand getting this cabinet into my trunk?”

Without a word, Borgin flicked his wand and the cabinet floated into the trunk. It barely fit in, but it made it into the apartment undamaged.

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After turning his trunk back into a wristwatch, he made his way back to the wand shop, figuring his spare wand was ready by now. Once he entered the shop, Wendelin, with her silky voice, said, "I just completed your wand." She then showed him the finished product. It looked polished. "Do you have the money?"

"Right here," Harry said, and he counted out the hundred Galleons for the wand, and took out the extra twenty he'd need for the holster, but put it in his pocket.

She gave him the wand, and the moment his fingers gripped it, a light show much more spectacular than what his other wand did – something more along the lines of magical fireworks that Fred and George would make – exploded from the tip of the wand, lighting the place up.

"An excellent fit," she commented, acting like there was nothing strange about that reaction. However, Harry could see surprise and a hint of fear in her eyes. "Now, you said you were also interested in holsters."

A few minutes later, Harry left the shop with his new wand in an invisible holster attached to his left hand. To retrieve his wand, he simply had to say, "Release wand," and the wand would shoot right into his hand for him to catch. Figuring it was too late to do any more shopping, he made his way back to the Leaky Cauldron.

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Harry got up early the next morning and, after putting his school trunk into his apartment trunk, went shopping yet again. He picked up some extra books at Flourish and Blotts, including the one on hexes he'd noticed with Hagrid as well as an advanced Transfiguration book that explained how to remove Dudley's tail. He then found a shop that carried the last expensive thing he wanted to buy – a Pensieve. He

figured that he'd get a lot of good use out of that. He also picked up a copy of the Daily Prophet, which had a story on the front page that said the goblins caught and killed Professor Quirrel for attempting to break into a vault. It had a rather graphic picture on the front that showed what he looked like after the goblins got through with him. Harry figured that no one who saw that newspaper would ever consider breaking into Gringotts, and got very nervous when he remembered that a Horcrux was inside Bellatrix's vault. He had no idea how he would retrieve that.

He then entered muggle London, where he bought a month's worth of food, as well as a few other useful muggle items including new clothes that fit, and put it in his trunk apartment. He then summoned the Knight Bus and arrived at Privet Drive at about 10:00, where a snowy owl immediately flew to his shoulder. Harry smiled brightly at his familiar as he pet her. "Good morning, Hedwig."

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Please review. Thank you to those who have.

I freely admit that I used the same kind of wand holster I invented for 'Harry McGonagall.' I happen to like that design very much.

## Chapter Two – Summer with the Dursleys

With Hedwig on his shoulder and watch on his wrist, Harry opened the door to Number 4 Privet Drive, where the Dursleys were all sitting around the television. Harry had to hold back his laughter at how uncomfortable Dudley looked sitting with a tail. When he closed the door, all attention was turned toward him. Dudley ran upstairs with his hand on his bottom while the adults glared at Harry – half-angry and half-terrified. Harry spoke.

“Uncle, I would like to make you a deal.”

Vernon’s face began turning red as he stood up and approached. “Deal, boy? What makes you think you can just waltz in here and make a deal after...after that?!”

When he was younger, Harry would’ve run to his cupboard when his uncle was this mad, but not today. “Because I can remove Dudley’s tail.”

“If you can remove that blasted thing, then do it NOW!” He towered threateningly over his hated nephew, causing Hedwig to fly out of Vernon’s reach as she squawked. “And what’s that bloody bird doing here?”

“Hedwig was a gift from Hagrid, and he’d be very upset if you hurt her,” said Harry, causing his uncle to pale. “No, I’m not removing Dudley’s tail right now,” Harry replied calmly to his uncle’s request. “I have conditions that you must meet.”

At this point, Vernon’s face was turning puce. “Conditions? You’ll do it now if you want any food!”

“That’s part of the deal,” said Harry calmly, which he could tell only served to infuriate his uncle more. He noticed that Petunia was watching the exchange silently from the sofa, and was certain that Dudley was listening, though he was nowhere in sight. “I won’t need your food or even your bathroom. I can take care of that magically.” His uncle’s face was dark purple now, but he didn’t speak. “All I need is my room. I’ll spend most of my time there. If I leave the room, it’ll

be to leave the house. If you simply leave me alone for the rest of the summer – that means no chores, not being bothered by any of you – then on the 31st of August, I will remove Dudley's tail. On the 1st of September, I'll leave for school. You won't need to give me a ride anywhere. I'll try to make other arrangements, but if I do return next summer, you won't have to pick me up, even if you get a letter that says you should."

Vernon was breathing heavily, but trying not to lose his temper. Harry knew that his uncle didn't want to endure the humiliation of having a doctor remove the tail. "How do we know that you can remove that tail or that you will, boy?"

"I promise that I will, but even if I didn't, then you wouldn't have actually lost anything. Besides, I'm your only chance without involving...outsiders."

"Fine," snarled Vernon, "but if I find that you've stolen one crumb of moldy cheese..."

Ignoring the rest of his uncle's rant, Harry said, "Come on, Hedwig," and walked up to his room with her flying behind him.

As he passed Dudley's room, he heard his cousin's scared voice come out of it, but couldn't see 'Big D.' anywhere. "Y-you can remove it?"

"Yes," Harry answered, "but I won't if you or your parents bug me this summer."

"B-but."

"None of you has ever given me a reason to be nice to you, so that's why I'm waiting until the end of the summer. Anyway, now I need to read up on more interesting hexes than that one. Bye."

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Harry walked into his room and closed the door. He wanted to charm the door not to open, but knew that magic would be detected in the house. He took off his watch and resized it.

The first thing he did is remove a lock he'd bought for his bedroom door, and some tools to install it. It was not an easy job for an eleven-year-old, but he was used to working hard all the time, and had no problems with it. Now, he could lock his room from the inside. When his aunt noticed what he was doing, he told her that, "None of you is to mess with this lock."

Once that was done, Harry decided that he was ready for lunch, so he climbed the ladder down into his trunk-apartment, where he heated a frozen pepperoni pizza. While it was in the oven, he made out a daily schedule. He decided that he didn't like being a scrawny, little kid, so he decided to start exercising. He would do some exercises like sit-ups and push-ups, along with some stretches and running. He set aside an hour for that after deciding to take a trip to a store that sold exercise equipment, in hopes of getting a treadmill and perhaps an exercise mat. He also thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to get a book on exercising, to make sure he wouldn't overdue it.

He'd then spend a few hours studying his schoolbooks, to make sure he didn't forget what he'd learned his first year. He planned on using his Pensieve to find all the assignments that he'd had to do for the year so he could prepare them in advance, and do better on them. He'd then practice Occlumency, which he'd bought a book on the previous day. He'd then practice DADA, although for the moment it would mainly be target practice. He was hoping that the Room of Requirement at Hogwarts would help him with that once school started. Not to mention that he'd get a sparring partner once the 18-year-old Hermione returned.

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Over the next few weeks, he quickly got into a routine. He did manage to purchase the exercise equipment he wished, and so he was soon working out. He managed to get through an average of three assignments per day, and had practiced his magic, which he thought was a bit more powerful than before, but wasn't actually sure



because he'd never pushed himself this hard back then. He'd re-learned how to apparate, as well as become his Animagus form, all within his trunk. He'd even learned from a book how to store a memory into a memory-sphere, like had been in the Department of Mysteries. He thought about attending concerts and selling memory-spheres of them at Hogwarts. Maybe he'd do it once he finished his primary objective – Destroy Voldemort and his followers before they start killing again.

During the last week of August, he felt he was ready for his first mission. He'd considered breaking into the Burrow and capturing Pettigrew, but felt that it was too risky. In a month, it would be much easier to catch him at Hogwarts. As much as he wanted Sirius out of Azkaban, he could not risk being caught, because he knew he couldn't get himself to fight the Weasleys if they caught him. He also didn't know whether Scabbers would be in Ron's or Percy's room at this time. Besides, he'd decided that he was only going to do this one mission without Hermione because it was absolutely necessary to achieve before school started, and would wait for her before he did anything else.

While inside his trunk, he got into his disguise, performed a disillusion spell on himself, and apparated at midnight.

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He popped into existence in the lobby of the Ministry of Magic, Harry was glad he'd thought to put a silencing charm on his boots as he began walking. He'd considered apparating directly to the Department of Mysteries, but thought that would be pushing his luck. As it was, he was worried that his apparition had been detected, but he felt that was unavoidable. He got up and, with his special wand, quickly put a cunfundus charm on the guard that was on duty so he wouldn't notice the lift opening when he got to it. Once he was on the lift, Harry told it to take him to level nine, wishing there had been stairs that he could've used instead as he listened to the loud noise it made.

When the lift opened, he noticed a guard watching to see who was in the lift. He had his wand pointed in Harry's direction. The guard was

obviously looking to see who had come to this floor, so Harry performed a cunfundus charm on him and moved on.

He soon found himself in the spinning room, and used the same method as before to find the appropriate, shiny room that contained the Time-Turners – marking each door as he tried it before the room spun around. He stepped into the room and walked through it, making his way quickly into the Hall of Prophecy. No one was inside, so he quickly found row ninety-seven and the memory-sphere with his name on it. He removed it, putting it into a large pocket, and replaced it with a duplicate, where he'd recorded a different message, just in case someone wanted to listen to it. Satisfied with himself, he walked back into the Time Room, opening the door to find the last person he would expect.

"Who's in there? Show yourself!" said a squat, toad-like woman that elicited more anger from Harry than he'd expected. In another life, she was actually the first person he'd ever killed. He'd killed her right after she'd murdered Arthur Weasley. Bringing himself back to the present, Harry saw that she was pointing her wand. Remembering that she wasn't a Death Eater, even if he did hate her, he decided to try not to kill her. He tried to hit her with a cunfundus charm, but she dodged it. He ran from his position, but she laughed, "I can see your outline!" She then shot a curse at him but missed, instead hitting the cabinet full of Time-Turners, smashing a few in the process.

"Stupefy!" shouted Harry, hitting her square in the face, and she fell down. Grinning, Harry got an idea. He quickly grabbed a handful of Time-Turners, both broken and not. He didn't know if the Ministry checked for fingerprints, but he'd worn gloves anyway so he wouldn't have to worry about it. He put one of the good ones around his neck, and placed the others around Umbridge's neck. He performed a charm he'd read about that imitated intoxication, and then performed another that shot liquor from his wand and sprayed her mouth, face, and clothes.

He then heard a guard coming, so he grabbed his new necklace and turned the hourglass twice, going back two hours just as an Unspeakable burst into the room and found Umbridge, passed out on the floor of the Time Room. Harry quickly made his way out, and

arrived back in his trunk the moment he left. That was the reason he wanted a Time-Turner, so that he'd have a perfect alibi for any mission that he performed.

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After what had happened, Harry couldn't resist getting the Daily Prophet for the next day, and laughed his head off when he saw the front page article. It had a picture of Umbridge right where he'd left her, still unconscious. The headline read:

Senior Undersecretary to Minister Fudge Revealed to be a Drunk

By Rita Skeeter

Early this morning, after a disturbance was detected at the Ministry of Magic, Senior Undersecretary Delores Umbridge was found drunk, passed out and reeking of liquor with rare, priceless artifacts from the fabled Department of Mysteries hanging from her neck – several of them broken. She claimed that she'd been responding to a disturbance, but fooled no one as she was summarily fired and sentenced to Azkaban for six months at an emergency meeting of the Wizengamot. Minister Fudge said, "I have no tolerance for such preposterous behavior from members of my staff!" However, he had no further comment when asked how such a person had managed to join his staff in the first place.

The article went on to tell about the toad woman's record, and detailed the exact crimes she was punished for – destruction of Ministry property and attempted theft of Ministry property. Harry did notice that the paper never actually mentioned Time-Turners by name, though, and figured that they weren't supposed to be common knowledge, which left him to wonder why a third-year student would be given one just to make it to extra classes. He gave up understanding that when he found he was developing a headache.

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A few days later was August 31st, and Harry decided to honor his agreement, just in case he had to come back the next year. For the

first time in a month, Harry unlocked and opened the door to his room at breakfast time. When he arrived in the dining room, all three Dursleys stopped eating and looked at him.

“Good morning,” he said cheerily. “If Dudley would come with me into my room, I’ll remove his tail.”

Vernon, with a venomous look that was actually quite frightening to most people, said, “He’d better be alright when you’re done. If I find out you’ve done something else to him...”

“He’ll be perfectly fine, but we’ll have to be alone in my room.”

“We’ll give you five minutes!” bellowed Vernon.

“Ten minutes,” countered Harry. “If you come banging on the door while I’m working it could ruin my concentration. Who knows what’ll happen then?”

Dudley at this point was shaking. “M-Maybe I should just...”

“You’ll be fine, Dudley.” He then looked at his aunt and uncle, and managed to stop himself from smiling at the new shade of purple that Vernon’s face turned when he added, “as long as no one interrupts.”

“Fine, but so help me, if you’ve...”

“Don’t worry,” said Harry calmly. “Dudley will be fine.” He turned to his cousin. “Let’s go.” Reluctantly, looking very frightened, the oversized eleven-year-old walked up the stairs as though he were on his way to the execution chamber. “Go on in,” encouraged Harry when they arrived at his door.

Dudley pulled the door open and stepped inside, noticing the open trunk in the middle. Harry had just locked the door behind them when the frightened boy asked, “H-how, when did you get a trunk? You didn’t bring anything with you.”

With a grin, Harry said, “Magic. Look in the trunk. You’ll find a ladder. You’ll need to climb down it and I’ll follow you.”

“W-what? How will we fit?”

“Magic,” Harry repeated, shrugging his shoulders. “Contrary to what your family might believe, magic is actually quite useful.”

“Fine, but if you’re tricking me...”

Harry then said, “Release wand,” and his special wand seemed to appear in his left hand, causing Dudley’s eyes to widen. He then hurried down the ladder. Harry laughed and then followed.

When Harry got down to his apartment, he found Dudley staring around the living room in amazement. “Yeah, this is a nice apartment, isn’t it?”

Dudley merely nodded.

“Alright, I’ll perform the spell on you to remove the tail. Just stand still.”

Dudley gulped before saying, “O-okay.”

Harry pointed his wand at Dudley and said a Latin incantation, “Eximo Cauda! There. That should do it.”

Dudley then put his hands on his bottom and felt it. A smile started forming on his face as he reached his hands beneath his pants. “It’s gone!”

“Then we’re done here,” said Harry. “Let’s go before your parents break down the door.”

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After Vernon had taken Dudley to the bathroom and confirmed that the tail was indeed gone, he told Harry, “You’re just lucky it’s gone. Otherwise, you’d be out on your ear right now, Boy!”

"I'll be leaving tomorrow, anyway," said Harry. He then added, "I'll be trying to make other arrangements for next summer, but if I do have to return, it'll be the same arrangement as this time."

"You just make sure you make those arrangements. Surely you'll be able to trick one of those freaks into being friends with you!"

Petunia added, "but if you have to have house space, we'll let you in the room again, but we're not giving you any food."

"Fine," said Vernon, before walking off. Harry returned to his room, a bit disappointed that they didn't even thank him, but not surprised.

-

The next day, Harry put his wonderful watch on and unlocked his door. He'd already eaten breakfast, showered and released Hedwig to fly to Hogwarts, knowing how much she hated being in a cage. He opened his door and quietly walked down the stairs and out of the house before anyone saw him. He hoped this would really be his last time at that house. When he was about a block away and out of sight, he stuck his wand hand out and signaled the Knight Bus, asking for a ride to Kings Cross Station.

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Please review. Thank you to those who have.

## Chapter Three – Second First Impressions

With plenty of time to spare, Harry exited the Knight Bus at Kings Cross Station. He quickly found a secluded spot where he got his school trunk out of his special trunk, so that he wouldn't look strange not having luggage. He also took out a book to read. He then sat in a spot that had full view of Platforms Nine and Ten and waited for a certain family to make an appearance. Within ten minutes, he heard the voices he was listening for.

"Are you sure that you've properly understood your instructions, Hermione?" asked a woman's voice, calling Harry's attention from his book. He couldn't stop the huge grin that formed on his face when he saw a little girl with bushy hair and buckteeth, pushing her trunk on a cart as tall as her, with her parents behind her. He wanted to kiss her right there, realizing just how much he'd missed his girlfriend for the past month. However, he knew that if things did go properly, she wouldn't be her old self for nineteen more days and would not appreciate his assault. However, that was no reason not to be friendly with her before then.

He carefully marked his place as Hermione answered, "Yes. To get to Platform Nine and Three Quarters..."

"Excuse me," said Harry, who had by this time approached them. The three Grangers looked uncomfortable, and he figured they thought he was a muggle and had overheard them. "Could you tell me how to get on Platform Nine and Three Quarters?"

Hermione's ears turned pink and she started looking at her shoes. "Er, I was joking. Of c-course there isn't a Platform Nine and Three Quarters."

"No, you weren't," he replied in a whisper. "I'm going to Hogwarts, too," he said, holding up his large tome to her. The cover said, Hogwarts, a History. Hermione's face lit up. Before she could respond, Harry continued. "The only problem is that Hagrid, the one who told me about the magical world, forgot to tell me how to get onto the platform."

“How dreadful,” said Hermione, obviously appalled that someone would forget such an important detail. “Professor McGonagall, who delivered my letter, told me straight away.” She then went into what Harry recognized as her lecture mode. “What we need to do is walk straight into the wall between Platforms Nine and Ten.”

“Wow,” he said, acting amazed.

“I’m Hermione Granger, by the way, and these are my parents,” she said, holding out her hand to shake his. “And you are?”

Taking a deep breath, he said, “I’m Harry Potter.”

Her eyes widened before looking up to his legendary scar. “You are him, aren’t you?” She then frowned. “You’re having me on. You knew full well how to get through.”

“That was very rude, Hermione,” chastised her mother.

“I was not,” Harry said quickly, now worried that he’d ruined Hermione’s first impression of him and he would have to wait three weeks to be friends with her. He phrased his words very carefully so that he wasn’t lying to her. “I was raised by muggles who hate magic, and I didn’t even find out I was a wizard until I got my letter.” He took a deep breath. “Hagrid brought me the letter and took me shopping in Diagon Alley, but he forgot to tell me how to get onto the platform.” He then decided to add, “That was also the first I’d heard the truth about my scar. My aunt told me I got it in the car crash that killed my parents.”

For the second time, Hermione looked appalled. “A car crash? They didn’t even tell you the truth about yourself? How awful.”

“Yeah,” Harry agreed. “Anyway, I think it’s time we got onto the platform. I want to get a good seat. Do you want to sit with me?”

He didn’t notice the grins that appeared on Mr. and Mrs. Granger’s faces when they saw that someone seemed to be befriending their often lonely daughter, but he did see her smile. “Sure,” she said



simply before adding, "Let's go." Side-by-side, they ran through the barrier.

"Wow," said Harry, gazing at the train.

"Yeah," she said, also transfixed with the sight. Her parents appeared directly behind them.

"It really worked," commented Mr. Granger, sounding a bit surprised as he looked around. "Well, honey, I guess we'll get your stuff on the train." He took Hermione's trunk off her cart as Harry did the same with his. They quickly found an empty compartment with Hermione and her mother behind them. Thanks to his having previously reduced its weight magically, Harry managed to get his school trunk on the shelf without help.

Hermione was hugged by both of her parents, who then turned to Harry. "It was good to meet you, Harry," said her father.

"It was good to meet you, too, sir," he said while shaking his hand. Hermione's mum shook his hand as well, and they exited the train just as the whistle blew, signaling passengers to board the Express.

The two sat in silence for a few moments before Hermione spoke. "How do you like Hogwarts, a History?" she asked.

Harry grinned. "It's actually not bad. I've been reading as much as I could for the past month to try and prepare."

Her face lit up. "So have I. There are so many things that kids raised in the wizarding world take for granted that muggle-borns don't know, and I really want to do well."

"You will," said Harry confidently and sincerely. "I'm sure of it. I wouldn't be surprised if you end up being Head Girl like my mum. She was muggle-born, too, you know."

Hermione was blushing from the praise until the last sentence, when she looked a bit irritated. "The books that mention you never said that.

They said the Potter family was an old pureblood one, but nothing about your mother.”

Before Harry could respond to that, the door to their compartment was opened. A small, shy redheaded boy was on the other side. “Er, do you mind if I sit here? Everywhere else is full.”

Harry had to blink back tears as he saw his old friend alive. He resisted the urge to hug him as he said, “Sure. Come on in. This is Hermione Granger, and I’m Harry Potter.”

Harry had to admit that despite how happy he was to see Ron, he was still irritated by the star-struck look he was giving him, especially when the redheaded boy glanced at his famous scar.

“Ron Weasley,” said the boy as he sat down. Harry tensed up when he saw the cage that Ron was holding. When he actually saw the rat, he had a very hard time not pulling out his wand. “This is Scabbers,” said Ron, not looking at Harry as he put down the cage. When he finally turned around and saw Harry’s expression, he asked, “What’s wrong?”

Shaking his head for a moment, the Boy-Who-Lived forced himself to calm down. “It’s nothing. I once had a bad experience with a rat. That’s all.”

“Oh, well, you don’t have to worry about Scabbers. He’s been in the family for years and never hurt anyone. He’s a family pet. He first belonged to my brother Percy, but since he was made prefect this year and got an owl, I got Scabbers.”

“I thought that only owls, cats and toads were allowed at Hogwarts as pets,” commented Hermione.

Harry looked flabbergasted. He’d never noticed that before. “It said that on my letter, too.”

Ron’s ears turned pink. “They let Percy keep him.”

“I’m not doubting that, Ron,” said Harry, “but it does seem a bit strange that they’d only mention those animals if any pet were fine.”

“Yes,” said Hermione, “They should say that rats are allowed as well, and any other animal that they don’t mind, like perhaps gerbils.”

“I suppose so,” agreed Ron, now that he wasn’t being defensive.

At that moment the snack trolley arrived, and Harry bought a bunch of snacks that he shared with his two friends, although Ron ate a lot more than him and Hermione put together. Harry managed to catch his chocolate frog before it got away this time. A short while later, Harry grinned when Neville arrived and asked if they’d seen his toad.

“Can’t say that I have,” said Harry, “But I’m sure he’ll turn up. Why don’t you sit down for a little while?”

“I suppose,” said the shy boy as he complied.

“I’m Harry; this is Hermione; this is Ron.”

Neville’s eyes flicked up to see the scar. “You’re Harry Potter.”

“That’s what my Hogwarts letter said. Would you like a chocolate frog?”

“Sure,” said Neville. “My gran doesn’t let me have any. She thinks they’ll escape before I eat them.”

“Sometimes they do,” said Ron. “We should probably close the window – just in case.”

The frog did leap for the window, but was stopped by it, and Neville grabbed the frog in the air and bit off its head.

While Ron and Neville were looking at chocolate frog cards, Harry turned back to Hermione and spoke softly. “The reason that no books mention that my mother was muggle-born is because of a ridiculous prejudice against muggle-borns that exists among the vast minority of the wizarding world.” He sighed as he saw her start to frown.

“Unfortunately, that minority currently holds the most wealth and political power. It actually has no basis in...”

At that moment, the door opened yet again, revealing Draco Malfoy and his two cronies. He glanced at each person in the compartment with a look of disgust, and then his eyes settled on Harry and did the familiar flick upward to his scar.

“You’re Harry Potter!” he exclaimed. “You lied to me at Madam Malkin’s!”

When Hermione looked confused, Harry explained while chuckling. “You see, we got our school robes at the same time, and he didn’t know who I was while we were talking. I told him I was muggle-born, and suddenly he sniffed the air and said it stunk, like there really was some sort of difference between us. It was hilarious!” Harry’s laughter was contagious as his other companions joined in laughing at how red Draco’s ears were turning. “He’s obviously been taught he’s superior to us, especially you, even though he can’t tell the difference between himself and the people he’s supposed to be superior to.” Harry was excitedly gesturing with his hands as he happily pointed out how stupid Draco’s beliefs were. “If I’d have said I was a pureblood, he’d have claimed he could tell I was wonderful like him. Then again, if he finds a pureblood like Neville or Ron that disagrees with him, then they’re automatically inferior, too.” Hermione was laughing out loud as Harry continued. “I told him that idea was just like Hitler with the Jews and he lost his temper and said...”

“Stop laughing, you filthy...”

“Mud-Blood?” Harry said in a mocking tone. “Is that all you can say, you stupid bigot? The reason imbeciles like you say things like that is because most of the muggle-borns are smarter and more powerful than you, therefore taking away some of the influence your worthless families have. The simple fact is that you and your family are afraid of muggle-borns replacing you. That’s why Moldy-shorts was able to get the stupidest of the rich purebloods to join him. I wonder if your family was among them. He must have really enjoyed the irony of having those prejudiced purebloods kissing his half-blood behind.”

“The Dark Lord was NOT a half-blood!”

“Yes, the Dork Lard was. His name was Tom Marvolo Riddle, and he went to school at Hogwarts – even became Head Boy. He rearranged the letters of his name to form the sentence, ‘I am Lord Voldemort,’ and started using that name so he could deceive the fools that followed him into believing he was a pureblood.”

Malfoy and his goons stormed out of there with red faces. Harry didn’t know if that helped the situation or not, but it felt good to tell Draco off. He’d thought about betting Draco that Hermione would do better than him in all their classes, but realized Malfoy would cheat, probably by getting Hermione injured so she couldn’t study.

“Is that true, about You-Know-Who?” asked Ron when the dust settled.

“Yes,” said Harry. “It’s not known by many people, but once I learned about my parents, I made it my business to learn everything about him that I could, including the fact that he got an award for special services to the school while he was a prefect. According to the book I read, it’s on display at Hogwarts right now.”

“What book was that?” asked Hermione, looking very interested.

“I forget.” When she looked disappointed, he said, “I’ll figure it out and let you borrow the book before the end of the month, I promise.”

“I’ll hold you to that,” she said. Then she pulled out her wand. “Have any of you practiced any spells?”

Harry and Neville shook their heads, but Ron spoke. “My brother Fred told me one that I tried yesterday, but it didn’t work. It’s supposed to turn Scabbers yellow,” he said, indicating his rat. Harry thought of a few spells he’d like to practice on ‘Scabbers’ that would do a lot more than turn him yellow. The red-head pointed his wand at his slumbering rat.

“Sunshine, daisies, butter mellow.

Turn the stupid fat, rat yellow.”

He waved his wand, but nothing happened. Scabbers stayed gray and fast asleep.

Hermione looked skeptically at Ron, and Harry had a very hard time not laughing when she asked, “Are you sure that’s a real spell? Well, it’s not very good, is it?”

“Ron,” said Harry, trying to stop an argument, asked, “Is there any chance that the spell could’ve been a joke?”

Ron’s ears turned pink. “I’ll bet it was,” he said angrily. “Fred was having me on!”

“That’s awful!” replied Hermione. “It’s hard enough to learn magic without being lied to. That’s why I always read about spells before using them.”

Ron seemed irritated at that statement, but Harry said, “I agree. Books aren’t always perfect, but they’re more reliable than an older brother pulling a prank. What spells have you learned, Hermione?” He was curious what spell she would demonstrate, since he’d repaired his own glasses a few days after he returned to the past.

Hermione pulled her wand out, along with a book of matches. “I read about this spell in ‘A Beginner’s Guide to Transfiguration.’ One of the first spells is to change a match into a needle.” She then took out a match and set it on the seat. After her first attempt, the match was silvery and pointed, but clearly it was still a match. She put down her head in shame.

Harry said, “Hermione, I think you didn’t move your wand exactly right. Let me show you.” He then demonstrated the movement with his wand, and she tried again. This time it became a needle.

Hermione smiled brightly at him. “Thanks, Harry!”

“No problem. That’s what friends are for.”

He heard her whisper, “Friends,” as her eyes lit up. Harry had to fight the impulse to snog her right there and remembered that he was only eleven, and she barely knew him.

“D-do you think you can help me with that spell, too, Harry?” asked as nervous-looking Neville.

“Of course,” said Harry, as he went over it again. He noticed Ron pretending not to pay attention, but moving his wand in the exact pattern the spell required.

The rest of the ride went by smoothly, as the four friends got to know each other – or in Harry’s case, got reacquainted. Before long, the train came to a halt at Hogsmeade Station.

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Please review. Thank you to those who have.

## Chapter Four – Starting School

“Firs’ years!” shouted Hagrid for all to hear as Harry and his three ‘new’ friends made their way off the train.

“Hi, Hagrid,” said Harry enthusiastically as they caught up to him.

“Hiya, Harry.”

“These are Hermione Granger, Neville Longbottom and Ron Weasley. They’re first-years, too.”

“It’s good ta meet ya. Now, you’ll have ta get in a boat. Ya four can share.” He then raised his voice for the other first-years to hear. “No more’n four to a boat.”

The quartet got on a boat and enjoyed the ride. Harry realized just how much he missed Hogwarts when he saw the castle. He did manage to simply gaze at it silently like the others. Hagrid found Neville’s toad in one of the boats while they were disembarking. Harry, along with the others, followed Professor McGonagall into the castle, and decided that saying anything to alleviate his friends’ fears about the sorting would make him look suspicious, so he stayed silent. Besides, he was nervous of what the hat would say when it was put on his head.

The sorting went exactly the same as before. After the hat sang his song, Hermione and Neville both went to Gryffindor; Malfoy went to Slytherin. Finally, McGonagall announced, “Potter, Harry.”

He totally ignored the whispering about him as he approached the bench and put on the hat. Almost immediately, he heard the hat speaking in his head. “Well, well, well. What do we have here, Mr. Potter? Not something I’ve seen often. It’s been at least a few centuries.”

“Really?” thought Harry. “There have been others? Who?”

“I’m afraid I can’t tell you or anyone else what I see in other students’ heads, which answers your next question. No, I can’t tell anyone, not



even the headmaster. Godric enabled me to read minds for the sole purpose of sorting students – not spying on them. I suppose you'll want Gryffindor again, although this is a very Slytherin plan you have."

"Yes, please. It will be very helpful."

"Very well. I do hope that you're more careful with your time-meddling than the last one I encountered. Perhaps the older Miss Granger will be of some help to you when she returns."

"I hope so," thought Harry.

"Good luck," the hat said in Harry's mind before shouting, "Gryffindor!" for all to hear. With great relief, and ignoring the cheers from the Weasley twins, Harry took off the hat and sat next to Neville and across from Hermione, waiting patiently until Ron was sorted into, "Gryffindor!" as well.

After Dumbledore said a few words ("Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak!"), the tables filled with food. Harry remembered how much he'd enjoyed this meal the first time he'd sat through this feast. He'd never been able to eat his fill before then and was malnourished. However, now, he'd been eating much better for the past month, so eating his fill wasn't as foreign a concept to him now, so he didn't really enjoy the feast as much, and really couldn't understand how Ron, who lived at the Burrow where feasts were common, could possibly be as enthusiastic about meals as he obviously was.

He passed his time conversing with Hermione about classes, letting her do most of the talking. To Harry's surprise, Neville joined in the conversation as well, expressing gratitude that Harry and Hermione had helped him some in Transfiguration. The last time around, all Neville talked about was how he was surprised to be accepted at Hogwarts. Ron was busily eating, and wouldn't have noticed if a Death Eater attack occurred unless his food was destroyed in the process.

While Harry was taking a bite of steak, he glanced up at the staff table and started choking. He knew that Quirrel had been killed by the

goblins, but hadn't given any thought as to who his replacement would be until that moment. Sitting close to Dumbledore, with Snape (who Harry hated no matter what the headmaster said) glaring at him, was none other than Remus Lupin. He was wearing shabby clothes similar to what he had been wearing the first time Harry had met him. Apparently, he hadn't taken the train this time. Truthfully, Harry had wondered why he'd taken the train during third year in the previous timeline. Surely if he could've woken up long enough to get on the train, he could've apparated. Harry guessed that Dumbledore had asked him to be on the train because of the Dementors, which turned out to be a good idea.

Neville slapped Harry on the back, which was sufficient to stop his choking. "Are you alright, Harry?" asked a concerned-looking Hermione.

"I'm fine," he said quickly. "Just went down wrong." He looked at the staff table again, and was actually pleased to see Professor Trelawney sitting there. Her death had occurred on September 2nd of what would've been Harry's 7th year, a few months before the other teachers were murdered. Voldemort had come to the school and mind-raped her with Legilimency until he got the prophecy out of her broken psyche, leaving her as a complete vegetable until he mercifully killed her after having some fun with her body for a few hours. Harry had witnessed most of the interrogation through his link to Voldemort while he was still mourning Arthur Weasley, who'd been killed the day before. The newspaper had said nothing about the Divination professor's death.

He then finished his meal and awaited the headmaster's announcements, which, besides introducing Moony, did include advising staying off the third floor corridor, "to everyone who does not wish to die a very painful death," so he knew that the Philosopher's Stone was still at the school. However, since Quirrel had been killed, it was likely that Voldemort was forced to go back to Albania since he had no one to help him. Harry would keep an eye out for any sign that Voldemort was still after the Stone, but didn't think he would find any.

After Dumbledore forced them all to sing the school song, Harry, along with all the other first-years, followed Percy down the longest

path between the Great Hall and Gryffindor Tower. Obviously, the pompous prefect had no idea of all the secret passages that existed in the castle.

[illegible]

With a small pop, Harry's small group appeared elsewhere. The Boy-Who-Lived was relieved they'd gotten out of Malfoy Manor alive. Harry opened his eyes and looked around to see trees everywhere. They were obviously in the middle of a forest. Dobby had been apparating them to an Order member's house, but Harry had felt something go wrong in mid-apparition and tried to help. He decided to ask the elf what happened. He turned toward his little friend before hearing Hermione shriek. Wondering if she was suffering a side-affect from the torture she'd just endured at the hand of Bellatrix Lestrange, he turned toward her.

She was on the ground pointing her wand at Neville, who was bleeding badly from the Sectumsempra spell Draco had cast at his back. From the way he was still bleeding, and the frustration his best friend was showing, Harry could tell that the wound wasn't healing. How he yet again wished Snape – that murderer – hadn't managed to save Draco's life the year before when he'd used that spell on Malfoy.

That was when he heard a thump and looked to see Dobby lying on the ground with a knife blade protruding from the elf's heaving chest.

“Dobby,” Harry cried as he watched a dark stain of blood spreading across his little friend’s front. “No, don’t die, don’t die.”

The elf's eyes found him, and his lips trembled with the effort to form words. "Harry...Potter." And then with a little shudder the elf became quite still, and his eyes were nothing more than great glassy orbs, sprinkled with light from the stars they could not see.

Before Harry could react, he heard Neville's weak voice saying, "I avenged my parents." He turned to see his former dorm-mate's eyes grow as lifeless as Dobby's. Hermione sniffed as tears flowed from her eyes. Harry understood that Neville had managed to kill Bellatrix,

and that it actually was a good victory for their side, but all he could think about was the boy who was looking for his toad on the Hogwarts Express seven years before. And here Harry thought he'd run out of tears during the past year.

He'd never remember who'd initiated it, but before long, he was locked in an embrace with Hermione, each of them crying on the other's shoulder as they mourned the loss of their friends – not only these two, but the countless others. Neither actually said it, but they both realized that they were now truly alone in the world.

Eventually, they separated and Hermione pulled a knife out of the bottomless bag she'd managed to hold onto. "We're going to have to dig graves."

“I’ll do it,” said Harry, holding out his hand for the knife. “You need to recover.” He held out one of the wands he’d managed to steal from Malfoy Manor. “Can you cast the privacy charms before you sit down, though?”

Neither of them knew how long it had taken Harry to dig the graves before Hermione, after having rested a few hours, levitated their two friends' earthly remains into them. They marked the graves and said a few words about Neville and Dobby before collapsing into each other's arms again.

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The next morning, Harry got up a few minutes before everyone else and quickly grabbed a robe and slippers. He was very tired. First, he'd had a hard time sleeping in the same room as Pettigrew, even with his curtains spelled shut. He had decided to leave Peter alone until Hermione was back so that they could choose the proper way to handle the situation, but he was finding it very difficult to do so. He wanted so much to torture and kill the rat.

Then, when he finally got to sleep, he'd had that nightmare, reliving one of his worst memories from the war. He supposed it was only natural that seeing his friends again would make him think about the

day he and Hermione lost the last of their friends. Once more, he reaffirmed his vow not to let it happen this time.

He left Gryffindor Tower and walked to the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy and looked at his watch. It was 6:55 a.m. He walked back and forth in front of the painting thinking, "I need a room to train in," over and over again. The door appeared; he opened it and walked in, leaving the door open. While he was setting the alarm on his watch to go off at 7:55 a.m., the door shut.

He found the room had everything he wanted, from muggle exercise equipment like a treadmill to magical dueling dummies. He did some stretches to warm up, and started his training – first on the treadmill. Before the session was over, he was dueling two practice dummies that would move around and shoot the magical equivalent of paintballs at him while he dodged and fired without using shields. Harry's reasoning was that if he got hit by any spell a Death Eater shot at him, it would penetrate his shield and he'd probably be dead, so it wouldn't matter what the dummies used as long as he could tell when he got hit. His plan was to keep increasing the number of opponents he could face at the same time without getting hit.

When his watch alarm went off, he was very sweaty. He disillusioned himself, pulled his Time-Turner out from under his shirt and turned it back an hour. He waited for the door to open and watched himself walk in. He hurried out the door and shut it behind him. Once it was closed, he made himself visible, walked to Gryffindor Tower and took a shower.

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Harry kept up his routine every day and managed to 'find' all his classes just in time so that he wouldn't appear to already know his way around the castle. However, he made sure he was never late to class. He allowed Hermione to be the first to learn a spell in most classes, but he was always second. However, he knew that he wouldn't be able to fool Hermione in Transfiguration when they were instructed to turn matches into needles. Since Hermione had seen him do it, there was no way he could convince her that he couldn't.

Consequently, he was given five house points for successfully completing the assignment first. Hermione and Neville did it soon afterward, and Ron was able to change his match's color to silver. Ron was unhappy about this, despite the fact that no one else in class even achieved as much as him.

Harry had taken Hermione's suggestion of studying together, mainly to spend time with her, and soon Neville had joined them as well. However, Harry always had his homework done before the study sessions since he'd done it all during the summer. Hermione was happy to look it over anyway, and much to his chagrin, the first-year Hermione was still able to find errors in his assignments.

Despite being invited, Ron didn't want to study with them or anyone else. Instead, he spent most of his time playing chess with Seamus or Dean. Harry couldn't worry about that at the present moment, because he was preparing for Potions class by memorizing as many advanced potions as possible. Despite what Dumbledore had told him, Harry seriously considered killing Snape, but figured that he'd never get away with doing it at Hogwarts. He had another idea about how to handle the greasy git.

[illegible]

“Harry Potter, our new – celebrity,” the Potions master said softly in the middle of attendance, entertaining Draco and his goons. He soon went into his speech about bottling fame and brewing glory, although Harry knew that if Snape really could do that, he wouldn’t be a schoolteacher. The so-called professor then stated that most of his students were dunderheads. The Boy-Who-Lived was more than prepared when suddenly the former Death Eater rounded on him. “Potter, what would I get if I added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?”

“A sleeping potion so powerful it is known as the Draught of Living Death, sir,” Harry answered in a neutral voice. Snape’s ears turned pink.

“Where would you look if I told you to find me a bezoar?”

“In the stomach of a goat, sir. A bezoar is a stone that will save people from most poisons.”

Snape's normally pale face was now turning a shade of pink. He looked very upset. "What is the difference between monkshood and wolfsbane?" he growled.

“Nothing, sir,” said Harry calmly. “They’re the same plant, and it also goes by the name of aconite.”

“Five points will be taken for your cheek, Potter!” Snape declared, causing all the Gryffindors to glare at him while the Slytherins laughed. “You’re just as arrogant as your father was.”

Harry had a very hard time not screaming what he was thinking. 'It wasn't enough that you as good as killed my father, but you've got to insult him, too!'

The instructor then yelled, “Why aren’t you all writing this down? Five points from Gryffindor, Longbottom, for not paying attention!”

Keeping his plan in mind, Harry was able to stay calm during class, keeping his eyes lowered to make sure Snape couldn't use Legilimency on him, and even made his potion to cure boils correctly. Not that it mattered. Snape vanished it as soon as he turned it in, giving him a zero for the day.

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After class, Harry immediately went to the closest empty classroom and pulled three vials with caps out of his book bag and set them on a desk. He then pulled out his wand and held it to his temple. There were two different spells for extracting memories for a Pensieve. One removed it from your mind; the other simply copied it. Harry copied the memory of that class three times and capped the bottles. He put a label on one of the vials and put it in his bag. He then took out two sheets of parchment to write letters. One was addressed to Professor

McGonagall, and the other to Headmaster Dumbledore. They both were the same.

Dear Headmaster Dumbledore/Professor McGonagall,

I have just come from my first Potions class, and would like to lodge a complaint against Professor Snape. He immediately singled me out, asking me three questions that are beyond first year material. Fortunately, I studied ahead and answered them correctly. However, he took 5 points from me for doing so. He then said that I was as arrogant as my father. At the end of class, for no reason whatsoever, he vanished my potion and gave me a zero for the day.

However, I'm not the only person that Professor Snape singled out and treated unfairly. He acted rudely toward all Gryffindors. I'm not sure how it is in the wizarding world, but in the muggle world, if one of my teachers acted like that, they'd be sacked for behaving in a nonprofessional manner. I did not come to Hogwarts to be insulted or to have my father insulted. If this continues, I'll have to consider transferring to another school. Perhaps Durmstrang would be more to my liking. My guardians don't care one way or another what school I go to, as long as I'm out of their hair.

I have enclosed a memory of the class. Last August, I made a second trip to Diagon Alley and bought a Pensieve and learned how to use it. It took a lot of practice, but I learned to copy my memories. It helps me to review my classes. If you don't have a Pensieve, I'd be more than glad to allow you to view the memories in mine.

Sincerely,

Harry Potter

P.S. I have also sent the same message and memory to

Professor McGonagall/Headmaster Dumbledore

Harry had made sure to remove all memories from his Pensieve the night before and put some new ones of different classes in it, just in case one of the professors inspected it. He'd given memories instead



of thought-spheres because that spell was even more advanced than the one he was using, and no first-year should be able to perform it. When he was finished with the notes, Harry went to the owlry and tied the parcels to Hedwig's legs, instructing her to first go to McGonagall and then Dumbledore, just in case the headmaster would remove Minerva's message in his efforts to protect Snape. Not that he thought this would actually do any good; he just felt like he should give the Headmaster a chance to correct things on his own before Harry went over his head.

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Harry arrived at lunch a bit late, but still had time to eat a few sandwiches after he sat next to Hermione. “Hi,” he said.

“What took you so long?” asked Hermione.

"I was putting together a complaint against Snape for McGonagall and Dumbledore." As if on cue, Hedwig flew into the hall, which was unusual for this meal, and went straight to the staff table.

Harry watched McGonagall take her package while Hermione said, "If I knew you were going to complain about his unfair treatment, I would've helped you."

Harry smiled at her. "I know, but I think it would be better if you complained alone. It would be better to have tons of complaints against him than just one. Besides, I sent a memory of the class, too. That should be enough proof."

“A memory?” she asked. Apparently, she hadn’t read about Pensieves yet.

“Yes,” he said, and then explained all about Pensieves, claiming that he’d bought his for studying purposes, and knowing that he’d have to show it to her that day.

Since Ron wasn't hanging out with him, Harry took Neville and Hermione to see Hagrid that afternoon. He realized that Ron had a lot of growing up to do before they'd really get along. The red-headed boy had the nerve to act like an eleven-year-old. He didn't hold it against Ron, but the fact was that they currently had very little in common. Hermione always was a bit mature for her age, and Neville was happy to have people to hang out with and wasn't obsessed with games. Harry always enjoyed games, especially Quidditch, but that wasn't the only thing he ever wanted to talk about.

When they arrived at Hagrid's hut, Harry immediately noticed the newspaper about Quirrel's failed attempt at robbing Gringotts and realized with shame that he'd spent more time milking his first friend for information than actually just enjoying his company, and vowed to change things this time around. He got Hagrid to talk about himself and his time at Hogwarts. The gamekeeper even talked a bit about both Harry and Neville's parents before they left.

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Harry wasn't surprised during dinner when both McGonagall and Dumbledore approached his table. They didn't look happy. Hermione, who had some idea what it was about, stopped eating and paid attention to them.

“Hello, professors,” said Harry.

“Good evening, Mr. Potter,” said the headmaster with a twinkle in his eye, “I feel that it is time for me to properly meet you. Would you mind coming to my office after dinner?”

"Certainly," he answered, "if one of you will show me where it is."

"I'll escort you," said Minerva.

“May I come, too?” asked Hermione.

Dumbledore gave her a grandfatherly smile. "I'm afraid not, Miss Granger. This is a private matter."

"It's about Harry's complaint against that vile man, isn't it?"

“Yes it is, but you should refer to Professor Snape with respect, Miss Granger,” corrected their head of house.

“I’m sorry, Professor McGonagall, but Professor Snape doesn’t deserve respect,” she replied courteously. “He behaved in a completely nonprofessional manner.”

Minerva sighed. "Yes, I know. I watched the memory. I believe that we should continue this discussion in private."

"I quite agree," said the headmaster. "If you'll finish eating..."

"I'm done," said Harry, putting down his fork.

“Me, too,” said Hermione, mimicking his action.

“Very well. You may come too,” said McGonagall. “Let’s go.”

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They walked out of the Great Hall and up to the seventh floor, until they came to a statue of a gargoyle. Harry couldn't hear the password Albus whispered to the guardian, but it moved aside and revealed a staircase. Once they were inside the office and had turned down the headmaster's offer of a lemon drop, Dumbledore said, "Mr. Potter, I'm sure that you realize it's not good policy to complain every time an instructor has a bad day."

“Headmaster Dumbledore, I’m sure you agree that it’s not good policy to blatantly favor one house over another, nor to speak ill of the dead.” Harry then paused for a moment as though thinking. “Did Snape know my father?”

“Yes, Professor Snape was acquainted with James,” answered Dumbledore.

Minerva added, "They hated each other," earning a glare from the headmaster that lasted a fraction of a second, "and obviously Professor Snape wishes to carry on that hatred."

"I'm sure that it was just shock at how much you look like your father that threw our Potions Master off balance today," said Dumbledore with a twinkle in his eyes.

Hermione questioned, "Then how does it explain how much he blatantly favors Slytherins and docks points from Gryffindors for no reason at all? We'd all heard his reputation before class from the other Gryffindors, but I didn't believe he would be this bad." She then took a deep breath.

Harry asked, "How many times has Slytherin gotten the house cup since he's been working here?"

Minerva answered, "All but one year, when points were awarded at the leaving feast. Why do you ask?"

"Because he's been cheating in giving and taking House points," stated Harry calmly, "making the House Cup a joke." McGonagall was turning red, but her anger wasn't directed at Harry. He added, "I dare you to look up the records of the points he's taken and given since he's been working here."

"While that may be an interesting observation," Dumbledore interrupted, "the most important issue is that you expressed a desire to leave Hogwarts that we wish to dissuade you of."

"Are you sacking Snape?" asked Harry.

"I will speak with him," said Dumbledore in a patronizing manner.

"Then I'll still be considering it. I believe that there are magic schools where teachers don't insult students and their families. I believe I mentioned Durmstrang."

"I would strongly advise against going there," said Dumbledore sternly. "Even if you decide to leave Hogwarts, I beg you not to attend

Durmstrang. The headmaster there is a former follower of Voldemort and teaches the dark arts.”

“How could a former Death Eater be worse than Snape?” asked Harry, causing Dumbledore to pale for a moment as Minerva glared at the headmaster. Harry had a hard time not laughing at the irony of that question and wondered if he could get them to admit Snape had been a Death Eater as well. When he saw they were silent, he said, “I suppose I won’t go there. Perhaps Beauxbatons would be better.”

Hermione added, “That’s the one in France. I seriously considered going there myself.”

“Your parents would’ve wanted you to attend Hogwarts,” said Dumbledore to the Boy-Who-Lived, trying to manipulate Harry’s emotions.

“Would my father have wanted me to put up with Snape?” Harry countered. Getting no reply, Harry said, “I’ll continue sending you both memories of Potions classes. If things haven’t improved by the end of the month, I will take action. Professor McGonagall, I suggest you ask students from other years to share their memories of Snape. If that’s all...”

“Mr. Potter,” said Dumbledore, “I cannot allow you to be so insubordinate. I must take one point from Gryffindor.”

“It doesn’t make any difference anyway,” said Harry as he turned around.

“You may leave, Miss Granger,” said McGonagall’s voice, letting Harry know his friend had waited to be dismissed.

She said, “While I admit that Harry was a bit...disrespectful, I agree with everything he said. Good day.”

Harry couldn’t help but smile as he started walking, with her right behind him. Once they were away from the office, she asked, “What did you mean by ‘take action?’ What can you do?”

He signaled for her to follow him into an empty classroom. Once he shut the door, he asked, "How would the public feel if they knew the kind of treatment Snape is giving the Boy-Who-Lived?"

"They'd be furious," she said pensively.

“That he was publicly insulting the late James Potter, a hero of the war?”

"Even angrier," replied Hermione.

“At the end of the month, I’m going to send my memories, along with a letter all about Snape, to the Daily Prophet.” He then extracted his memory of the meeting he’d just left for his collection.

She grinned. "That's a great way to use your fame! Perhaps we can collect more memories from students in other years. We can demand a proper Potions teacher."

[illegible]

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

Harry did have to show Hermione his Pensieve.

## Chapter Five – Preparations

The famous diadem worn by Rowena Ravenclaw, on which is inscribed the phrase, 'Wit beyond measure is man's greatest treasure,' was rumored to bestow wisdom when worn. However, it was never located among Ravenclaw's possessions after her death, so no one has seen it for over 1,000 years.

"What are you reading?"

Harry's best friend's voice caused him to look up from the tome he was rereading. He'd been wondering if Ravenclaw's Diadem could possibly be one of the missing Horcruxes. He grinned at Hermione. "Surely you recognize this book."

She looked a bit more closely at it, and immediately smiled at him. "Hogwarts, a History. I didn't think you'd reread it. I thought I was the only one."

"It's a fascinating book. I was just reading about Rowena Ravenclaw. She was supposed to have something to wear on her head that made her wise."

"Her tiara," she stated.

"You mean diadem," Harry corrected.

"They mean the same thing," she said with a grin.

"Do you know if any books have a picture of it?"

"I haven't seen any, but there are probably some in the library. Why?"

"No reason," he answered quickly.

"Harry, people have been trying to find it for 1,000 years. Don't tell me you think you will?" she said in her sometimes annoying know-it-all tone of voice.





"I'd take you on anytime on my own," said Malfoy. "Tonight, if you want. Wizard's duel."

Loudly, so that his voice would carry, Harry replied, "That sounds like an excellent idea, but not tonight. Professor Lupin, could you come here?"

The D.A.D.A. instructor got up from the staff table, looking puzzled. Harry noticed that now almost every eye in the Great Hall was on him. Draco and the others were all looking at Harry strangely. Once Lupin was close enough, he said, "Malfoy here has just challenged me to a wizard's duel, and I'd like to accept. I was hoping it could be for extra credit."

"Harry, what are you doing?" hissed Hermione into his ear.

The Marauder looked from Harry's determined face to Draco's frightened one, and a small grin appeared on his face. "An excellent suggestion, Mr. Potter," he replied. "When and where would you like it?"

Draco said, "Er, in your classroom in a week?"

"Nonsense," retorted Harry cheerfully. "When I beat you I want it to be in front of everybody – right here – and I'd like it to be right after dinner." He then looked into Draco's eyes. "Unless you're scared and need time to plan how to cheat."

"I'm not scared," he declared stubbornly, causing Harry to smile even brighter.

"Excellent," said Lupin, whom Harry realized knew all about Draco and his Death Eater father. "We'll keep it wands only – a duel until one of you is disarmed or incapacitated. No dark curses. We'll also only allow first-years as your seconds. Speaking of which..." he looked at them expectantly.

The Boy-Who-Lived turned to his best friend. "Hermione, would you be my second?"

She looked a bit pale. "Are you sure? I don't..."

"You're the smartest witch in our year, Hermione. I have full confidence in you."

She blushed slightly at his praise. "If you're sure, then I accept."

Draco looked at his companions. "Crabbe is my second," he said arrogantly.

"Very well. I'll arrange it with the headmaster," said Remus before leaving them.

"Two purebloods against a half-blood and a mudblood," commented Draco.

With the same look in his eyes he'd had when he killed Umbridge in another time, Harry said, "Before the duel is over, I'm gonna see some of your pure-blood on the floor."

Draco gulped but tried to look brave as he said, "We've got to get back to the Slytherin table."

While Harry was watching his minor enemies make their way to their table, he could already hear Fred and George taking bets on the duel. He even heard Neville put a Galleon on him. The gossip about the upcoming fight had spread across all the tables, so that it really was unnecessary when Dumbledore made his announcement at the end of the meal.

"May I have your attention, everyone? It seems that we will have some entertainment tonight. Mr. Malfoy of Slytherin and Mr. Potter of Gryffindor have agreed to duel for all who wish to observe," Dumbledore said with a twinkle in his eyes. "The winner will receive extra credit in Defense Against the Dark Arts, as well as Ten house points. Professor Lupin will be referee." Harry actually believed that Albus liked the idea, but he could tell that McGonagall was against it. Snape was currently whispering in Draco's ear, no doubt trying to teach the half-squib some spells. "If you'd all stand against the walls, I shall rearrange the furniture to accommodate this distraction."

All the students complied, and before long, Dumbledore was waving his wand, causing two of the tables to combine and then transform into a dueling platform. The other tables were transfigured into bleachers.

Harry found himself standing at one end with Hermione and Professor McGonagall, while Malfoy, Crabbe and Snape were at the other end. Minerva wasn't pleased, but she was there as his head of house. Harry noticed that Madam Pomfrey was nearby and didn't look happy.

McGonagall looked at Harry. "I can't believe you got yourself into this, Mr. Potter."

With the most innocent expression he could make, Harry answered, "He wanted us to have the duel at midnight – against the rules. Now, I can't just refuse and act like a coward. I am a Gryffindor, and I'm not afraid of him. He does nothing but spout that pureblood nonsense, and I'm gonna put him in his place."

"Fighting isn't always the answer, Mr. Potter."

With a stern look, he faced his head of house. "My parents, along with countless others, gave their lives to stop this prejudice. I will not put up with it."

"Very well," she said. "Make Gryffindor proud."

Hermione then said, "Good luck."

He grinned at her and winked. "Thanks."

At that moment, Lupin performed a Sonorus spell on his throat. "Duelists, take your positions." Harry walked up to a red X that was on the floor and took out his wand, assuming a dueling stance. Harry wondered if Draco would start early, and was ready to respond. "You'll duel until one of you is disarmed or incapacitated. Remember no dark spells. Professor Dumbledore shielded the platform so no

spells can accidentally hit the audience. You'll begin at the count of three. One, two..."

"Serpensortia!" Draco bellowed, causing a long, black snake to shoot out of his wand.

As quickly as possible, Harry said, "Evanescio," vanishing the snake, followed by, "Wingardium Leviosa," causing Draco to begin rising above the floor.

The Slytherin was moving about unevenly as Harry moved his wand a bit to cause turbulence while he rose higher from the ground. His face was obviously terrified, and people in the crowd were snickering at him. When he was about six feet above the platform, he managed to say, "L-let me down, Potter," trying to sound brave.

Ignoring him, and in a condescending tone, Harry asked, "Didn't your mummy ever teach you how to count? Three comes after two. Or is it different for purebloods?" Lots of people laughed out loud at that as Draco rose further toward the ceiling.

"Let me down, you son-of-a-mudblood!" he shouted, clearly scared. Many people in the crowd gasped at his language.

Draco finally was beginning to aim his wand despite the unsteadiness of his ascent, so Harry let the spell go for a moment, causing him to fall from fifteen feet toward the ground. He caught Malfoy at the last second with another casual, "Wingardium Leviosa." At that moment, everyone noticed a small trickle of liquid leaking out of the left leg of Draco's trousers and laughed. However, Harry ignored that as he scolded Malfoy while shaking his head in mock disappointment. "Such language. Very well." From about three feet up, Harry released the spell and his victim fell. Harry calmly waited for him to get up while faking a yawn.

"Rictusempra," Draco shouted from the floor, shooting a jet of silver light at Harry's face.

He quickly squatted and the beam went over his head. Harry then shot a cheering charm at his opponent, which hit him square in the

chest. Malfoy started laughing uncontrollably, doubling over in mirth as the rest of the crowd laughed at his predicament. With a trembling hand, Draco pointed his wand at Harry again, who decided to put him in a leg-locker curse. While still laughing, the prince of Slytherin was now hopping and desperately trying to avoid falling on his face. Harry decided to end it now.

He pointed his wand at Draco and shouted, "Infligo!" A yellow light shot out of his wand and hit Malfoy in the nose, simulating the affect of punching him. Nose bleeding, Draco dropped his wand before falling over backwards, tears now streaming from his eyes, yet still laughing. Most of the crowd cheered.

Remembering how this boy had murdered Neville by shooting him in the back, Harry showed no pity as he walked forward and picked up Draco's wand. Harry faced the crowd and loudly announced with a smirk, "Look at the rich, pure blood flowing freely from his nose. I've never seen such blood before! And the magnificent grace with which he fell on his..."

“Mr. Potter! That’s quite enough,” McGonagall interrupted him sternly, causing the crowd to laugh some more.

Lupin announced, "Harry Potter is the winner!" and allowed Madam Pomfrey to treat Draco.

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When Harry arrived at Gryffindor Tower, he was given a hero's welcome! Fred and George had acquired Butterbeer for the spontaneous party while many of his fellow Gryffindors were congratulating him for humiliating that Slytherin.

"That was a..." said Fred.

"Good show!" said George.

Even Percy commented that Harry made an excellent use of the Levitation charm, and was impressed that he'd already mastered it

over a month before Professor Flitwick covered it in his first-year Charms class. Harry admitted to reading ahead, and also to having purchased a book on common jinxes that he learned the other spells he'd used in the duel from. He figured that was the best explanation for his skills. He had made sure not to use any spell that was too advanced for someone his physical age to have mastered.

Others were laughing at how Draco had been humiliated so thoroughly. Lee Jordan commented that Draco probably had a house-elf take his math classes before he came to Hogwarts as a possible explanation to his starting the duel early. Others commented on the puddle of urine Draco left on the floor while many complimented how Harry had commented on Malfoy's pure blood.

In the midst of all the celebration, Harry noticed that Hermione was silently sitting alone in a corner. He made his way to her as quickly as he could, which wasn't very fast in the midst of all the congratulating going on. Harry thought his back would break if one more person patted it by the time he reached his best friend.

"You're awfully quiet," he commented, sitting directly across from her.

She looked up from the book she was reading. "Oh, I didn't see you sit down." She then put on a fake smile. "Congratulations. You dueled very well."

"Thanks," he said, "Now, do you want to tell me what's bothering you?"

"Nothing."

Ignoring that lie, Harry asked, "It's not the fact that I dueled Malfoy, is it?"

"No," she answered. "I understand why you had to do it."

"Good," he replied. "So what's wrong?"

After marking her place in her book, she looked in his eyes. She took a deep breath before saying, "I heard what you told Professor

McGonagall about how many people died over prejudice against muggle-borns. I'd even read about it before coming here, but the books I have said that the prejudice is gone. You even said that it's the minority that believes it." She looked ready to cry.

He sighed. "I also said that minority has influence. But that's why people who believe that nonsense have to be proven wrong. That's what the duel was all about. Draco thinks that he's more powerful than everyone of 'lesser blood' than him, and he's completely wrong." Harry grinned at her. "My mother was a muggle-born, so he thought he'd beat me."

"You proved him wrong about that," she agreed, "but I'll bet he still believes that."

"Yes he does believe that stupidity," he said with a sigh. "But that duel will change a lot of other people's minds."

"I hope so," she said, "But I just can't understand how people really believe that so strongly."

"I understand," he said. "But you can't let it get you down. Opinions are slowly changing, and we've got to help them change. "I would suggest that you stay on your guard around Malfoy and his friends. You never know if they'll try something."

She sighed. "I guess so. Do you think the Malfoy family will cause problems about this?"

He shook his head. "I don't think so. Draco challenged me to the wizard's duel and cheated at the beginning. Then I beat him fair and square. There's nothing his father can do about it, and he knows it." He paused for a moment and smiled dreamily. "Draco might be in trouble with his family for it, though. Maybe he'll be taken out of Hogwarts."

"In your dreams, Harry."

"Yes," he replied with a smirk. "In my dreams."

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Lucius Malfoy did not show up at the school in the aftermath of the duel, but Draco did seem depressed. Harry also noticed a lot of people picking on the arrogant pureblood and wondered if there would be repercussions for his duel. His hope was that if he consistently reinforced the idea that Malfoy is no better than anyone else, he'd eventually believe it, or at least stop acting like he thinks he's better than everybody. Before they'd gone back in time, he and Hermione had discussed the children of Death Eaters.

[illegible]

“I don’t think we should attack them,” said Hermione. “Because they might not end up the way they are now. We’ll be taking away the influence of their criminal parents while they’re still young, so they may turn out differently.”

"I suppose," said Harry.

“And besides, they haven’t committed any crimes yet. People like Lucius Malfoy have already committed countless atrocities and bribed their way out of prison, but at age eleven, kids like Draco haven’t. They just have very bad manners.”

“And should be slapped around, not executed,” he finished.

“Exactly.”

[illegible]

It was only the memory of that conversation that kept Harry from seriously hurting Draco during the duel. In fact, he'd wanted to throw Neville's killer off the Hogwarts Express before they even arrived at school, but had decided that it was better to discredit his father's teaching than to just kill the git. And if discrediting that philosophy



required humiliating Draco to prove he's not superior to anyone, Harry would gladly do it.

Harry was pleased with the result of Malfoy no longer arrogantly strutting around the school as if he owned it. He was also happy to note that nobody seemed afraid of Draco anymore and the Slytherins seemed subdued. Harry's only fear was that Malfoy would try to get revenge in a sneaky way, shooting him in the back, as was Draco's preferred method, so he was quite careful. He had no fear of a direct, fair confrontation, but knew that no Malfoy ever fought fairly.

Snape was worse than ever in his classes, so Harry had plenty of memories for his collection. Copies were still being sent to McGonagall and Dumbledore, for all the good they would do, and one set kept being added to the package for the Daily Prophet.

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It was after dinner on September 18th, less than six hours before the older Hermione was supposed to show up, and Harry was walking down the hall with the younger version of her. His anticipation had him in a very good mood.

“So,” she said, “when are we going to send in those memories of Snape?”

"I figured we'll do that at the end of the month," he replied with a smile.

“Alright,” she agreed. “And don’t forget to loan me that book about You-Know-Who you mentioned on the Hogwarts Express. You promised to get it to me by the end of the month.”

Harry grinned at her. He'd actually forgotten his promise to the younger girl. "Don't worry. Soon, you'll know everything I do about Voldemort."

"Good," she smiled back.

At that moment, they turned a corner and saw something on the floor in front of them. Harry immediately recognized it as photograph that he'd seen in McGonagall's office in another time. It appeared to be a family photo. Minerva was about thirty years old and was standing next to a tall, dark-haired man about the same age, and sitting in a carriage in front of them was a baby. Every few seconds the man would squeeze Professor McGonagall's shoulder while she looked down at the infant with an expression of joy and love that Harry had never seen on his head of house in real life. He'd never had the opportunity to ask her about it before.

"What's that?" asked Hermione, indicating the photograph.

"It looks like a young Professor McGonagall." He noticed a huge crack across the frame and pulled out his wand. "Reparo."

BOOM! Instead of repairing, the photograph exploded with a loud noise. It wasn't a powerful explosion, but it was strong enough to destroy the picture. Harry and Hermione were both too stunned to move for the couple seconds it took for a few people to arrive, the first of which was the Head of Gryffindor.

"Mr. Potter," she asked, "What happened? What are you aiming your wand at? Don't you remember that no magic is to be performed in the hallways?"

As Harry was putting his wand away, he noticed Malfoy at the front of the crowd smirking at him and realized that Draco was behind it. He turned back toward the Transfiguration professor. "It's a picture of..." He paused when he heard her gasp as she looked at the broken face of the baby in a fragment of the photo that survived. It was silently crying.

"What were you doing with that photograph, Mr. Potter?" she asked harshly. Her lips were thinner than he'd ever seen them, and her face was pink. She was clearly madder than she'd been when he and Ron drove a flying car to Hogwarts in another life.

"Hermione and I found it on the floor there..."

“How did it leave my office?” she asked.

“We don’t know,” answered Hermione. “We just found it on the floor.”

“And you decided to blow it up?” she questioned.

“No!” said Hermione. “The frame was cracked, so Harry performed a Reparo spell on it and...it blew up.”

McGonagall turned to Harry. “Am I to believe that you, a top student here, suddenly have your spells going this badly?”

The Boy-Who-Lived couldn’t help but notice the look of satisfaction on Draco’s face behind Minerva. “Professor, I think that Malfoy had something to do with this. That he...”

“I wasn’t even on this floor when I heard the explosion!” he yelled.

McGonagall asked, “Did you see Mr. Malfoy do something with that photo?”

“Well, no, but...”

“But what, Mr. Potter?”

“Nothing, Professor,” he answered, knowing that he had no proof.

“Very well, Mr. Potter. I am taking thirty points from Gryffindor, and you will be serving two detentions. I’ll let you know when at a later time. For now, clean up this mess the muggle way and then go straight to Gryffindor Tower.” She turned to the caretaker, who’d shown up with his beloved cat. “Mr. Filch, please loan Mr. Potter your cleaning equipment and watch him clean this mess up.”

“Yes, Professor,” he answered.

As the crowd began to disperse, Harry vowed vengeance on Draco, but for now, he was still looking forward to tomorrow’s reunion with the love of his life.

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Please review. Thank you to those who have.

## Chapter Six – Hermione's Entrance

Hermione Granger pulled her bed curtains closed on the eve of her twelfth birthday. The last few weeks had been among the best of her life. For the first time, she had actual friends. In her other schools, sometimes someone would pretend to befriend her and then try to get her to do his or her homework. When she refused, they left her alone or began picking on her like most of the other kids, calling her a buck-toothed, bushy-haired bookworm and similar insults.

When she'd gotten her visit from Professor McGonagall, who brought her Hogwarts letter, she'd hoped that explained why she was different from all the other kids. She had hoped she'd be able to make friends with her new classmates who were also magical, and she had. Harry Potter had befriended her even before they got onto the platform, and had helped her gain other friends. She felt that she should be happy about how things had worked out, and she was. However, tonight she was sad and couldn't blame anyone but herself. Her birthday was tomorrow, and she knew that nobody would wish her a happy birthday or acknowledge it in any way, because she hadn't told anyone.

How could she expect her friends to remember information they'd never been exposed to? Everybody in the wizarding world knew Harry Potter's birthday, but she didn't know any of her other friends' birthdays. They'd never talked about them. The subject simply hadn't come up. She wouldn't feel right telling everyone that it's her birthday tomorrow, as though she were looking for attention. She almost laughed at herself, because whether she wanted to admit it or not, she did want a bit of attention on her birthday. She decided that the best birthday present she could have was true friendship, whether her friends knew it was her birthday or not. It was with these thoughts that the girl went to sleep, never to be the same again.

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At the stroke of midnight, a Hermione Granger woke up at Hogwarts, but it wasn't the one who went to sleep. Staring at the dark ceiling, the eighteen-year-old woman in a twelve-year-old body gasped as

she felt information from the past nineteen days begin pouring into her head. Just when the process was beginning to give her a headache, it was over.

She could clearly remember her first time boarding the Hogwarts Express and helping Neville find his toad, meeting Harry and Ron in the process. However, she could also remember meeting Harry outside of Platform Nine-and-Three-Quarters. She could very clearly see what he'd changed in this timeline, and found herself wanting to snog Harry senseless for how wonderfully he'd treated her younger self this time around. She was a bit sad that they didn't get along as well with Ron this time, but realized that at this point in his life, he wasn't very mature and shouldn't be expected to be. She was glad that he was alive again, but realized that they didn't have much in common now.

She also wondered what changes Harry had made that he didn't tell anyone about. She remembered Harry's interest in Ravenclaw's Tiara, and now realized what that was about. She felt a bit foolish for accusing him of wanting to wear the Diadem, and fully believed that Harry had laughed at her for that once he was alone. She wondered if he'd made any progress with that. With a grin, she recalled his promise that she'd soon know everything about Voldemort that he did, and realized that he wasn't lying to her when he said that.

She realized that Professor Quirrel wasn't there and wondered how Harry had accomplished that. She also wondered if he'd been behind Professor Lupin getting the D.A.D.A. job. She loved Harry's idea about getting Snape fired. With the reasonable doubt brought on by Dumbledore in the 'in-between place,' she wouldn't feel right executing the greasy git, but she agreed that he needed to get out of Hogwarts because he was doing a lot more harm than whatever good he did.

She realized the negative effect Snape's 'teaching' was having on the wizarding world. With the way he acted, hardly any non-Slytherins continued Potions after O.W.L.s, even if they somehow got his required 'O' in the subject despite his poor instruction. She remembered that even with Slughorn's lowered requirement, only twelve students were in their 6th year class. Consequently, there

were a lot fewer Auror recruits every year that Snape taught at Hogwarts, which was part of the reason Voldemort had had such an easy time taking over the Ministry. She wondered just how many careers that single professor had stopped before they began – not only as Aurors, but as Healers and countless other occupations.

She had so many questions for Harry, and couldn't wait to talk to him. She smiled as she remembered how happy he'd been acting the day before, even after getting those unfair detentions, and realized that he knew it would be her birthday and she'd be back. She also wondered what it was like for him to get to know her younger self all over again. She giggled as she thought back to the way he'd introduced himself to her this time, claiming he didn't know how to get onto the platform. From previous conversations, she realized that the first time around, he hadn't known how to get there, and that had been how he'd met the Weasleys, and he'd worded his explanations so that they were technically true. She then remembered that his sorting took longer than before and wondered how he'd convinced the hat not to cause any problems. She just couldn't wait to interrogate him about everything he'd done since the 31st of July.

After tossing and turning for a few hours, she realized that she wasn't going back to sleep, so she quietly got a book out of her trunk and went down to the common room to read. She sat down on a comfortable chair facing the fireplace and read until sleep finally overtook her.

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“Do you think anybody lives there?” asked a seventeen-year-old Harry Potter as he and his only friend came across an obviously old cabin. He had his right arm around her shoulders. In the few days since Neville and Dobby died, they’d hardly been separated at all. They even slept on the ground next to each other, and woke up holding hands.

"It doesn't look like it," answered Hermione. She then performed a quick spell at the door, which briefly changed color to a light shade of

orange. "It looks like this door hasn't been opened for over a hundred years."

"Maybe we can use it as a base," suggested Harry. "I don't know about you, but I'm tired of moving around all the time."

"But it wouldn't be safe...unless..." She walked forward, leaving Harry behind as she was in deep thought. "...I could try it...what do we have to lose..." she muttered to herself as Harry watched. He'd never before realized how cute she was when she had an idea. She suddenly turned around with a determined expression on her face. "I'd like to try putting this under the Fidelius Charm."

His eyes widened. "You know how to cast that? Sorry, stupid question." He shrugged his shoulders. "That's fine with me."

She grinned at him. "Good, because I want you to be Secret-Keeper."

"Why me? Why not you?"

"I'll be casting the charm. It's more difficult to make yourself Secret-Keeper. And besides, if I'm captured, I don't want to be able to betray you no matter..."

"I don't want to betray you, either!" he interrupted.

"But you're more important!" she argued.

"I am not!"

"The prophecy makes you more important!" She took a deep breath as she thought of a way to calm him down. "It won't matter anyway, because we'll look out for each other, right?" He nodded, still looking skeptical. "Then we should do the one that's easier for me, and that's having you being Secret-Keeper."

That was the end of the argument, and Harry did cooperate, mainly because he did want to stop traveling. When the charm had been cast, Hermione looked exhausted. "We should get you to bed."



“Not yet,” she countered, looking a bit uncomfortable. “I need to do one more thing.”

“What’s that?”

Her ears were pink, but Harry couldn’t figure out what was bothering her. “I need to make a lavatory.”

“What?”

She looked at him, exasperated. “Surely you know what a…”

“I know what it is,” he commented, “but there is an outhouse…”

“I’d also like a shower!” she snapped at him. Taking a deep breath, she continued, “Look, it’ll only take five minutes, and then finally we can start living like civilized people again.”

“Okay,” he said, backing away from her. “I’m sorry.”

She sighed. “I’m sorry, too. I think the stress has been getting to both of us.” He walked up and put his arms around her.

“I don’t think I ever properly thanked you for coming with me.” When she started to protest, he continued, “You could’ve gone with your parents to Australia, and no one, including me, would’ve thought lesser of you.”

“I couldn’t…”

“I know.” He hugged her tightly for a moment before loosening her to separate just enough that he could look in her eyes. “For some reason I’ll never understand, you’ve never abandoned me. I’ve always been able to count on you like no one else.” He took a deep breath. “I’d never have made it this far without you, and I need you to know I do appreciate everything you’ve done and everything you’ve given up for me.”

“You, you’re important to me,” she said, looking him straight in the eyes.

“And you mean more to me than anything else. I, I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“You’re not without me, and you mean more to me than anything else, too.”

They were still gazing intently into each other's eyes as their breathing became a bit shallow. Harry finally spoke. "I need you. I..." Temporarily losing control of himself, he crossed a mental barrier he'd put up years before as his lips met Hermione's for the first time.

Harry woke up with a smile on his face as he recalled the memory of his first kiss with his Hermione. He remembered that it was over an hour before she got back to work. Checking his watch, Harry saw it was just after midnight. He figured that she was back already, but thought she'd sleep through the night and wake up a different person. He couldn't wait to see her again! He did his best to go back to sleep.

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Hermione got up with a start and grabbed her wand. She knew someone was in the room with her. She opened her eyes and turned just in time to see Harry, wearing a robe, jogging pants and trainers, groggily open the door. He looked half asleep as he stepped outside and closed it. She immediately got up and sprinted in that direction, hoping she could talk to him now. She pushed the door open, and to her astonishment, Harry was standing there facing her. Only now, he was full of sweat and panting like he'd run a mile. Not only that, but he looked wide awake.

“Hermione?” he asked, anticipation radiating from his lovely green eyes. “Is it...you?”

She smirked at him. "I feel like a new woman."

He gazed in her eyes for a few seconds before the biggest grin she'd ever seen on her boyfriend formed. "It is you! I've missed you so much!" Without another word, he threw his arms around her and

brought his lips to hers. For a few moments, Hermione couldn't remember anything except for her beloved. While she hadn't been separated from him as long as he'd been separated from her, it was still so easy to get lost in his love. Then, her brain started functioning again.

Reluctantly, she pushed him away. She nearly cried when she saw his dejected look. "Harry, I love you, but we can't."

"But..." he began to argue.

"Remember," she whispered, just in case someone could hear, "We're supposed to be first-years. We can't risk being caught acting...older."

"Can't we even kiss?" he asked with the cutest expression she'd ever seen. She felt herself going weak at the knees.

"Only when no one could possibly see us. Maybe in the Room of Requirement."

He grinned, grabbed her arm and said, "Let's go."

"Not now, Harry," she said while starting to giggle like a school girl. It felt so good to be desired. "You're all sweaty. Speaking of which, how did you get like that. I saw you leave less than a minute ago."

"The same way you..."

"Hey, Harry," called Neville from the stairs. "If you want to beat Ron to the shower, you'd better hurry up."

Harry answered, "I'll be right there," before turning back to Hermione. "I've got to go. Ron takes forever in the shower. If I don't leave now, I won't be able to get cleaned up until tonight. We'll talk later." He took her hand and rubbed it affectionately with his thumb. He whispered, "I love you," as he let go and walked off with a spring in his step she distinctly remembered that he hadn't had before in this time. She decided it was time to take her own shower. She would have to make

a note in her journal that her feelings were that of a teenager and not a little girl.

[illegible]

After they both cleaned up, they walked down to breakfast side-by-side. For a moment, they'd held hands until they realized they were doing it. They sat next to each other, across from Neville, in silence for a few seconds. The Longbottom boy seemed to be acting nervous as he said, "Hap...Hermione, good morning."

“Good morning, Neville,” replied Hermione.

"Hi, Neville," said Harry as he piled up his plate.

“Hi, Harry.”

Breakfast went on, and Harry finished eating before Hermione. He silently sat and waited for her to finish her first decent meal in months as she heartily dug in. When she was done, Harry said, “Hermione, could you come with me? There’s something I’d like to talk to you about before class.”

She glanced at her watch before looking at her unofficial boyfriend. "I'm not sure we have time..."

He cut her off with a huge grin. "We have all the time we need. Trust me."

Looking down at the table and back at Harry, she decided, “I do trust you. You’d better not make me late to Transfiguration.”

“I won’t; I promise. Let’s go.” He took her hand and pulled her out of the Great Hall, through the Entrance Hall and into an empty classroom and set their school bags down on a desk.

After Harry closed the door, Hermione asked, “What is it that can’t...oh.” She just spotted the Time-Turner that he pulled out from under his robes. “Where did you...”

“Hold on,” he said as he put the necklace around her neck as well. He turned the hour glass three times, sending them back that many hours. After tucking the Time-Turner back under his robes, he said, “Release wand,” and his Hungarian Horntail Heartstring and Yew wand shot into his left hand, causing his girlfriend to gasp. He pointed the wand at the door and performed several privacy charms to make sure no one disturbed them. He then took off his watch and expanded it into a trunk, much to Hermione’s surprise. He opened it to his apartment. Indicating for her to climb down the ladder, he said, “After you.” She climbed down, looking in all directions, followed by him.

After she was comfortably seated across from her boyfriend, she grinned. “You certainly are full of surprises today. Tell me everything. How’d you get that Time...”

Putting his hands up, he calmly said, “Let me start from the beginning, and I’ll answer any questions you have after that.”

For the next two hours, the Boy-Who-Lived told the Girl-He-Loved everything he’d done from the time he got back on his birthday. She approved of his extra shopping, and his deal with the Dursleys. She loved how he let the goblins handle Quirrel. When he told her about his break-in at the Ministry, she said, “That was a brilliant idea to get the Time-Turner – I wish I’d thought of it – but it was very dangerous.” However, when he mentioned how Umbridge had been arrested, she started laughing her head off. When he showed her the newspaper he’d kept with the picture of her passed out and dripping with liquor, she nearly fell off her chair.

When he explained his training, she easily understood what she’d witnessed earlier. Finally, she got to the point where she started telling him how foolish it was for him to duel Draco like he had. “You’ve shown everybody how powerful you are...”

“By using a few first-year charms and something from a basic book of hexes?” he retorted.

“Maybe so, but you’ve still brought attention to yourself, and that’s not a good idea.”

Putting his head in his hands, he said, "Look, I can't stand being on the same continent as that murderer, let alone the same castle." He looked into her eyes. "He's lucky I didn't kill him on the spot! You saw what he did to Neville!" He took a deep breath. "I thought I did a good job controlling my temper during the duel."

Sighing, Hermione said, "I understand, Harry. I'm sure I'll have a hard time dealing with him, too."

"Not if every time he bothers you I kick his..."

"Harry, language!"

"Sorry, dear," he said in mock penitence.

"Moving on," she said, ignoring him, "I know you were reading up on Ravenclaw's Tiara. Have you found out anything new about it? Like whether or not Riddle could have turned it into a Horcrux?"

"No," he said, shaking his head. "I haven't even found a picture of it. The thing disappeared a long time ago, and no one alive knows anything about it."

"Have you talked to the Ravenclaw ghost?"

He stared at her for a few moments before smiling. "Good idea! You don't know how much I've missed having you with me. From the time we met, I don't think I ever tried to muddle my way through anything without your help before. It's a wonder I haven't ruined everything yet."

"You've done a good job," she argued, "but thanks. I'm glad I can contribute."

"We should make sure to do that this week. You should also start training with me every morning."

She nodded in agreement before glancing around the room. Her eyes widened. "Harry, isn't that the vanishing cabinet that Draco..."

Slapping his forehead, Harry nodded. "Yeah, I forgot. I bought that my first da..." He stopped speaking when she planted her lips on his. He returned the kiss.

After about two minutes of snogging, she pulled back. "That was brilliant!"

"Uh, huh," he said in a daze, nodding his head lazily. "It sure was."

"I don't mean that; well, that was brilliant, too. I meant buying the cabinet before Draco could use it! We should collect the other one, and then we can use them. Maybe we could keep one at my house."

"Sure," he nodded absently. It had been awhile since he'd made out with his girlfriend, and had forgotten just how good it felt.

"We'll also have to set some ground rules for our relationship now. We should probably stop kissing."

That got him alert. "N-no, we don't need to do that."

She put her hands on his shoulders. "I know it feels really good, but I'm afraid that if we don't set limits, then we could...make mistakes. We're physically too young to be even dating. I don't think we should officially date until third year."

His eyes widened. "Third year? I barely made it seven weeks without you! Now..."

She put a hand over his mouth. "Just let me finish. We can kiss a bit in private, perhaps once a week, but we can't get too affectionate. It'll just make things harder."

"It sure will," he said suggestively, causing her to blush.

"Ignoring that statement," she said, "We need to begin making plans."

They discussed Horcrux ideas, as well as Death Eaters for awhile, and decided that they'd get Hermione a new wand the next time they





along with it, but while Harry was opening the door she was saying, "If you need to talk to me alone, we should go to the Room of..."

"SURPRISE!!"

Her eyes went wide as she processed the fact that all the Gryffindor first-years, along with a few Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs, were in the room staring at her. She also noticed a table with cake that had twelve lit candles on it. "What?" she whispered. She'd never had a birthday party at Hogwarts before. Her close friends had given her gifts and wished her well, but never thrown a party for her.

As Harry ushered her inside, they all started singing, "Happy birthday to you!" and Hermione felt her eyes moisten, but she quickly blinked back the tears.

"Th-thanks, guys," she said. At that moment, she wasn't sure whether she felt 18 or 12 years old. All she knew is that Harry was the only one who knew it was her birthday, so he had to have been responsible for this. She really, really wished it would've been appropriate to snog him senseless right then and there.

The party passed in a blur. She blew out the candles and ate a piece of cake. She opened presents, all of which were small, inexpensive things (mostly candy), but that didn't matter. She was touched that everyone came to the party and gave her a gift. Harry had only given her a homework planner, but she knew that this gift was for show. He was planning on buying her a new wand and holster once they could get out of the castle.

When they got back to the Common Room, Hermione did give Harry a hug to thank him for the party and whispered, "I wish I could really show you how much I appreciate this."

"So do I," he responded before inconspicuously casting the Muffliato charm around them.

"I'll be down here just before seven to join you for training," said Hermione.

"If I can open my eyes long enough to notice you. I was so tired this morning that I had no idea anyone was in the Common Room."

"I'd think that by now you'd be used to getting up early and not be so tired."

“You have no idea how hard it is to go to sleep in a room with Wormtail,” complained Harry, deciding not to mention his dream of their first kiss.

With a devious grin, Hermione said, “We’ll take care of Pettigrew tomorrow morning.”

[illegible]

Please review. Thank you to those who have.





They found themselves in a secluded spot in Diagon Alley, where they were not likely to be noticed. They looked around, and seeing no threats, began to make their way toward Knockturn Alley. Within ten minutes, they were inside the shop called Wendelin's Wands.

The pale, dark-haired woman behind the counter asked with her silky voice, "May I help you?"

“Yes,” said Harry, using the same rough-sounding voice he’d done last time as he summoned the wand she’d made. “A few months ago, you made this wand for me.”

“Yes, I remember now. Horntail Heartstring and Yew. Surely you haven’t had any trouble with it?”

“No. It’s worked quite well. So well in fact, that my friend would like one of your wands, too.”

“Very good, sir.” She turned to Hermione, whose face was obscured by her cloak (just like Harry’s). “I’ll need you to put your hand over the box of wood and say, mei talea.”

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After Hermione had gotten her core substances (Hippogriff feather and holly), they left the shop with the promise to return in about an hour for the completed wand. Once they were out of sight, they cast notice-me-not charms on themselves and apparated directly to the atrium of the Ministry of Magic. It was quite busy that day, and so they blended in with all the magical beings of all sizes as they walked in the line. They easily got past the 'wand inspector' by not being noticed and got into the lift.

They rode the lift until they heard, “Level two, Department of Magical Law Enforcement.” They exited and got into a secluded corner, where Harry removed the rat from his trunk, re-stunning him in the process, and put Wormtail into the pocket of his robe.

After replacing his watch/trunk, he and Hermione walked directly to Kingsley Shacklebolt's cubical. Harry remembered it from his first trip to the Ministry in the previous timeline. At that time, the cubical had been covered in pictures of Sirius Black, but this time it was covered in wanted posters of various wizards and witches Harry was unfamiliar with. Apparently, Kingsley wasn't currently concentrating on a specific case.

"Hello. My name is Auror Shacklebolt. How may I help you?" Kingsley was speaking in a friendly voice, but Harry could see that his hand was near his wand. It appeared that his cubical was warded against notice-me-not charms.

As Harry looked at his past/future acquaintance, he couldn't help but remember reading about how he'd died fighting a horde of Death Eaters, taking out twenty in the process. He blinked back the memory and got back to the business at hand. "Mr. Shacklebolt," he said in his disguised voice. "May we speak to you someplace a bit more private?"

Looking warily at the two figures obscured by dark robes, he answered, "I can put up a few privacy spells here so we're not overheard, but that's it. It's not auror policy to purposely allow ourselves to be outnumbered by people we don't know."

Harry grinned at this. "An old auror I once met would be proud of you. He liked talking about having constant..."

"Vigilance," completed Shacklebolt with a grin. "Mad-Eye Moody." He then pulled out his wand and silently cast a few spells. "Alright. No one can hear us. What's this all about?"

Harry reached in his pocket and pulled out the stupefied rat. "This is an unregistered Animagus. Would you please perform the spell to force him back into human form?" He placed him on the desk.

Looking skeptical, Kingsley replied, "Okay. I'll play along for now." He pointed his wand at the unconscious rodent and performed the transfiguration. The shocked look on his face was priceless as the rat morphed into a short, balding man.

Speaking for the first time during the meeting, Hermione reached into her robe pocket, pulling out a roll of parchment as she said, "This is Peter Pettigrew, a man who was believed to be dead."

“What?” asked Kingsley.

“This letter will explain everything,” she continued. “Just make sure he doesn’t escape.”

Once Shacklebolt took the scroll from her, the young couple turned around and walked out of the building, finally apparating back to Knockturn Alley when they got to the atrium.

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After picking up and paying for Hermione's new wand, along with a holster like Harry's, they returned to Hogwarts through the Honeydukes passage. Using the Time-Turner, they were able to get to class on time with no problems. Harry was informed that his first detention with McGonagall would be that night an hour after dinner. Ron went upstairs to the dorm while Harry and Hermione were sitting in front of the fireplace waiting for it to be time for the Boy-Who-Lived to serve his unjust punishment. They weren't surprised when they heard the childish scream from Harry's dorm.

Every Gryffindor was looking at the boys' staircase as a red-faced (and red-haired) first-year stomped down the stairs. "Scabbers is missing!" he declared angrily.

After that announcement, Harry turned to Hermione and said, "I think it's time I went to McGonagall's office. Hopefully, she'll be calmer now and I can clear this matter up."

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Harry stood outside his Head of House's office, took a deep breath, and knocked on the door, hoping that his gifts would be received.

"Come in. The door's open," her voice called out. She sounded neither angry nor happy. He opened the door. "Good evening, Mr. Potter," she said neutrally. He walked in and looked around.

Professor McGonagall's office was just as Harry remembered it with two exceptions. One was that it didn't contain the Quidditch Cup and the other was the missing photograph.

"Your detention will be cleaning the Transfiguration classroom. The supplies you'll need are already there."

"Yes, professor, but could I speak to you for a minute before I begin?"

Sighing, she nodded, "Very well, Mr. Potter."

"First of all, I'd like to apologize for my part in that picture being destroyed, even though it was a minor, accidental role." When she appeared about to object, he continued, "I know you don't believe me, but someone else took the photo and sabotaged it."

"And you're still asserting that it was Mr. Malfoy?"

"He is my primary suspect, but I admit that I don't have any proof of who did it. I only know that I didn't." He took a deep breath. "That picture seemed important to you, so I did come up with a way for you to replace it." He then pulled a small glass orb out of his book bag. "This is a thought sphere. My book about storing memories talks about them. You could permanently put a memory of those people in it." He pulled out the mentioned tome and lied, "I can't do it myself, but I'm sure that you could follow the book's instructions." He didn't want to make her too suspicious of his abilities by being able to perform such a complicated spell. It was amazing enough that he could operate a Pensieve, but he had to reveal that to accomplish his goals.

She appeared to be touched by the gesture, but maintained her composure. "Thank you, Mr. Potter. That was very thoughtful."



He then pulled a corked vial out of his pocket and held it out to her. "This is my memory of what happened regarding that picture. It's all I know about it." She took the memory, which contained everything from the time Harry and Hermione found the picture until he started cleaning the floor. It included Draco's expressions. "Now, I'll get to work." He left and went to the classroom.

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An hour after leaving Professor McGonagall, Harry was on his hands and knees scrubbing the floor of the Transfiguration classroom. His body was used to this from his time with the Dursleys, so he didn't really mind doing it. He just didn't like being punished for something he didn't do. He was busily scrubbing a mud spot on the floor when the door opened.

Before he looked up, he heard his Head of House say, “Harry, I think you’ve scrubbed enough. Could you come back to my office?”

After putting the cleaning tools away, he followed her and they sat down on opposite sides of her desk. He was going to speak when she interrupted by saying, "I want to thank you, first of all, for your thought sphere." It was then that he noticed it on her desk. She put a hand on it, and the same scene that had been in the destroyed photograph was being played out in 3-D above the orb. He smiled at it.

"I'm glad you like it."

"I do." She took a deep breath. "I don't like to talk about it often, but...I once was married and had a child. This is them...Jeremiah and Elisabeth." She blinked her eyes a few times, as though to hold back tears. "Lizy and her father were killed early on in You-Know-Who's rise to power." Minerva sniffed. "She was only a baby."

"I'm sorry," said Harry, sympathetically.

“We both have lost our families to him, left only with pictures...” She trailed off before sighing. “When I saw that photograph destroyed, I’m



“Just remember,” whispered Hermione with a smirk. “When you play that game, try catching the Snitch with your hand and not your mouth.”

“Ha-ha very funny,” he hissed back. “You know perfectly well that it was because of Quirrel...”

"If you say so," she said before winking at him. "Good night."

Before he could respond, she gave him a kiss on the cheek and walked up the stairs.

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That Saturday (after Quidditch practice) Harry and Hermione were walking around the corridors of Hogwarts, on a particular mission. They were looking for the Ravenclaw house ghost – most commonly known as the Gray Lady. It wasn't long until they did see a ghostly figure drift by them, but the pearly white figure they spotted wasn't the one they wanted. However, Hermione thought he might be of help.

"Excuse me, sir," she said timidly. "Aren't you the Hufflepuff ghost?"

“Why, yes I am, dear child,” he said delightfully. “Most people call me the Fat Friar.”

"It's good to meet you. I'm Harry..."

“Mr. Potter, everyone at Hogwarts, even the ghosts, knows who you are.”

"I'm Hermione Granger," said the Boy-Who-Lived's companion quickly, to cover up his unease at being reminded of his fame.

"It is good to meet you both. Is there anything I can help you with?"

“Actually,” said Hermione. “There is. You see, we’re trying to meet all the house ghosts, rather than just our own.”

"A rather splendid idea," he said with a grin. "Perhaps we can help bring about school unity. Hopefully the Baron will be agreeable. I do hope that Sir Nicolas doesn't mind," he added, eying their robes.

"Oh," said Harry. "He doesn't mind." He took a deep breath. "Do you happen to know where the Ravenclaw ghost is?"

"Why, yes," he replied. "I just left the Gray Lady a few minutes ago. She was around that corner and down the hall a bit." He pointed in the proper direction.

"Thank you," both Harry and Hermione said at once as they took off.

"You're welcome," the Fat Friar joyfully shouted toward their backs. He muttered, "Kids today...always in a hurry. Oh well. At least they're on a noble task of friendship."

"Hello...Gray Lady," shouted Harry as he spotted the lovely ghost floating away from him. She consented to stop and turn around.

"Hello," she nodded. Harry thought she looked haughty and proud, but didn't say so.

"You're the ghost of Ravenclaw Tower?"

"That is correct." Her tone was not encouraging.

Hermione asked, "Do you know anything about the lost diadem?"

A cold smile curved her lips. "I am afraid," she said, turning to leave, "that I cannot help you."

"Did Tom Riddle ever ask you about it?" asked Harry. The ghost stopped again.

"He did, didn't he?" asked Hermione. "And you told him, didn't you?" she added softly.

"I had...no idea," she stammered apologetically.

“You weren’t the first person Voldemort wormed things out of,” said Harry sympathetically, “nor the last.” Realizing that he didn’t need the whole story, just specific information, he asked, “Do you know where there’s a picture of it?”

"No book we've looked at has one," Hermione added.

"No portrait of it was ever painted, and the photographs you take today didn't exist then," she said, sounding unusually sentimental.

Harry looked down, sighing disappointedly. "I'm sorry to have bothered you." He turned.

“Wait,” said the Gray Lady. “While what I said is true, a sculpture of my mother was made while she was wearing the diadem.”

Harry turned, looking perplexed. “Your mother?”

"Yes," she nodded. "When I lived, I was Helena Ravenclaw."

“Where...” began Hermione before being interrupted.

“It is in Ravenclaw Tower’s common room.”

[illegible]

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

I believe that the urgency of the situation in Deathly Hallows prompted the Gray Lady to say much more about the tiara than she did in this chapter.

## Chapter Eight – The Sacking of Severus Snape

The next day (Sunday) after breakfast, Harry and Hermione walked up to the shortest member of Hogwarts' staff. They'd discussed various methods of sneaking into Ravenclaw tower, and had come to the conclusion that sometimes the direct approach was better. If it failed, they could always try sneaking in later. They approached the enthusiastic Charms teacher as he was leaving the Great Hall.

Hermione asked, "Professor Flitwick, could we have a moment of your time?"

"Certainly, Miss Granger, Mr. Potter. How may I help you?"

"Well," she said nervously, clearing her throat as she looked down at the floor. "We've both read 'Hogwarts, a History' and are absolutely fascinated by the founders."

"Yes," the head of Ravenclaw agreed, "They were remarkable people."

"Right," said Harry. "We, er, heard that there's a statue of Rowena Ravenclaw in Ravenclaw Tower and, er..."

"We were wondering if you would allow us to look at it," finished Hermione.

"Certainly," he replied happily. "Come with me." He began walking in the appropriate direction as he said, "I wish more students would take interest in Hogwarts' history. Did you know that Rowena Ravenclaw was one of the first..." He rattled off what seemed like the entire history of the founder in question as they headed toward the tower. Harry was bored beyond belief, but managed to fake interest enough to convince Flitwick he was listening. Hermione, on the other hand, had pulled out a muggle pen and tablet and was taking notes. It was much harder to handle parchment, quill and ink while walking up a spirally staircase.

When they reached their destination, Flitwick answered a riddle that had been asked by the eagle door-knocker in order to gain entrance.

Harry knew he'd absolutely hate to have to answer a riddle every time he wanted to go to bed. He further realized that it wasn't a secure method at all. Any clever person could answer a riddle, whether they belonged in Ravenclaw Tower or not. He much preferred having a password.

After the door opened, Harry and his girlfriend got their first glimpse of Ravenclaw Tower. It was a wide, circular room, with graceful arched windows punctuating the walls, which were hung with blue-and-bronze silks. The Boy-Who-Lived gazed at the spectacular view of the surrounding mountains. Hermione was in awe of the bookcases filled with glorious tomes that took up most of the wall space.

Several Ravenclaws who had been sitting at the tables studying looked up at their three visitors when Flitwick said to his guests, "Welcome to Ravenclaw Tower. The statue is right over there." While the students went back to their books, he indicated a niche opposite the door that contained a tall statue of white marble – Rowena Ravenclaw.

"She was beautiful," commented Hermione as they walked toward it. The statue stood beside a door that Harry guessed led to dormitories above. "That must be her famous tiara," commented Hermione, trying to sound casual about it.

"Yes, indeed," said Flitwick. While the professor began speaking about the headpiece, Harry examined the delicate-looking circlet on top of Ravenclaw's head and had a flashback to the first day he'd seriously hurt someone. At the time, he'd been full of Draco Malfoy's blood and trying to find a place to hide Snape's old Potions book (although he hadn't known that at the moment). He had been relieved that Snape had saved Draco's life at the time, but now he wished the ferret had died. It would've saved a lot more lives later on. Not for the first time, he wondered why Albus considered Draco's life so much more important than Katie and Ron's. He'd nearly killed both of them and Dumbledore knew it, yet he let the ferret walk freely so that he could sneak Death Eaters into the school.

Refocusing his thoughts on the current issue, Harry remembered seeing that very diadem, albeit, dusty and tarnished, in the Room of Requirement while he was hiding the book. He'd even picked it up, just like the locket at Grimmauld Place. He held his temper again as he considered how much easier things would've been if Dumbledore hadn't kept all his secrets to himself. If they'd been told about the Horcruxes as soon as Voldemort returned – if not sooner – the war might have gone a lot differently. However, Dumbledore enjoyed being the master of information – giving out too little and too late to do any good – far too often.

“...and so, people have been searching for it ever since.” Flitwick appeared to have finished telling his story, so Harry smiled.

“Thank you, Professor Flitwick,” he said with a grin. “This truly is a wonderful work of art. Thank you very much for allowing us to see it.”

“You are welcome, Mr. Potter. Have you both gotten a good look at the statue?” They both nodded. “Very well.” He began walking toward the exit, and they followed. They walked down the spiraling staircase they’d walked up minutes before, and finally, the professor said, “Will you be able to find your way from here?”

"Yes," said Harry. "Thanks, again."

“You’re welcome.”

Once Flitwick was out of sight, Harry turned to his girlfriend and whispered, "I know where Ravenclaw's tiara is. Come on."

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‘I need a place to hide my book. I need a place to hide my book. I need a place to hide my book.’ Harry paced back and forth while Hermione stood waiting for the door to appear. They hadn’t spoken since he told her he knew where the tiara was located and he started walking as fast as he could toward the Room of Requirement, with her practically running to keep up. The door opened and he walked in quickly, letting Hermione enter before closing the door.





“Now that we’ve got the headpiece,” said Harry as the RoR reshaped itself into a more comfortable setting, “we’ve got other important matters to discuss, like what we’re going to do to Draco.”

Rolling her eyes with a smirk on her face, Hermione answered, “Only you would put revenge on the ferret at nearly the same priority as our mission.”

“You’re right,” said Harry with a grin. “It should’ve taken higher priority.”

Hermione mumbled something that sounded like, “Boys,” while stifling her laughter.

"I figured that since he got me in trouble with McGonagall, we've got to get him in trouble with Snape."

“We?” she asked, putting on an expression of mock shock. “I don’t recall Malfoy doing anything to me to warrant such a response.”

Harry shrugged his shoulders, knowing she was kidding, yet playing along. "If you don't want in on the prank, that's alright with me."

"You know I was kidding," she replied. "I'd never turn down a chance to bring the pureblood ponce down a peg."

“Good,” he said. “It needs to be something that will force Snape to punish him.”

“Then it’ll have to be public.”

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About an hour later, the couple left the RoR to go to lunch. They were half-way to the Great Hall when two ghosts approached them. Actually, Nearly-Headless Nick seemed to be pleading with the other one – a grim, silent, terrifying ghost covered with bloodstains. Harry and Hermione both instantly recognized him as the Bloody Baron, and wondered why Nick was apparently trying to introduce them.





Harry was sitting on his bed wearing a new school uniform while extracting memories when there was a knock on the door. "Come in, Hermione," he said, having a good idea who it must be.

The door opened, revealing his partner-in-time, who asked, “How did you know it was me?”

“My roommates wouldn’t have knocked. In fact, no other guys would’ve knocked, which left females. I figured that you were the most likely suspect.”

"It could've been McGonagall if she'd heard what happened," she offered.

“Too soon. I figured that you packed up your stuff, along with whatever I forgot, and ran here after me.”

She couldn't deny the fact that she was panting, and had indeed done just as he'd predicted. She had a very hard expression on her face. "I can't believe that mean, cruel, vindictive bas..."

“Hermione, language,” he admonished with a laugh.

“This is serious!” snapped Hermione. “That...thing...actually...”

"I know what he did," interrupted Harry. His face took on a stern expression. "He moved up my timetable by a couple days. I'm sending the package of memories to the Daily Prophet tonight."

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“I see you’ve got new clothes on,” sneered Draco, flanked by his two flunkies. He was standing next to the Gryffindor table at dinner to taunt Harry.

“Do you want another duel?” Harry asked, sneering right back at the ponce.

Draco took a half-step backwards and gulped before sneering once more. "Big talk. Too bad you've got that detention. And all those house points lost, too."

"Everyone knows the house cup has been a complete joke since Snape started working here, and it doesn't mean anything either way."

"I wouldn't go that far, Mr. Potter," said a voice from the other side of Harry. He turned to see his head of house. "But I can certainly understand why you feel that way. Mr. Malfoy, unless you want a detention, I'd suggest you and your friends return to the Slytherin table." The three stooges left. Once they were out of earshot, Minerva turned her attention back to Harry. "I watched your memory of this morning's Potions class, Mr. Potter, and I've never been more appalled at Professor Snape's behavior. You can rest assured that..."

"I wouldn't be so hasty, Minerva," came Professor Dumbledore's voice. Snape was standing behind him with an evil smirk. It was a very disturbing expression.

She turned toward her boss. "You saw what Snape did, Albus! How can you..."

"A professor has full authority in his classroom to handle discipline as he sees fit," Dumbledore interrupted.

"But he..."

"This matter is closed. Harry has detention tonight and tomorrow, and has lost several of Gryffindor's house points..."

"For being victimized by this monster!"

"Calm yourself, Minerva. You will not interfere with Mr. Potter's discipline. It would be seen as preferential treatment if one professor overrides another. We cannot have the staff fighting amongst itself. It is a poor example for the students."

She gazed at the man she used to admire in disbelief. “Poor example? Severus is...”

“That is my final word, Minerva. Good evening.” He turned around and began walking.

"I'll expect you in the dungeons in ten minutes, Potter. You won't require protective gloves," Snape sneered and walked away.

“I, I’m sorry, Harry. I...”

Making a spur of the moment decision, Harry decided to trust his head of house. With a whispered tone, he asked, "Could Hermione speak to you alone for a few minutes while I'm in detention, Professor McGonagall?" Hermione looked at Harry in confusion.

“Certainly, if she wants to.” The Head of Gryffindor was looking in between the two of them.

Harry looked at his girlfriend and said in a low voice, "Would you tell her what I plan to do with my memories after the detention? What we've been planning for weeks?"

"If you're sure," Hermione answered in a whisper.

He smiled at her, and then at McGonagall. "I think we can trust her. She can probably even be of help." He took a breath. "I'd appreciate it if you'd have the package ready when I'm done, although I'll probably have a new memory to add. Two, unless one of you provides the conversation we just had."

"I will," said Hermione.

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After a grueling three hours with Snape, being insulted as he scrubbed the floor with a cleaning solution that gave his hands many slight burns, Harry started making his way toward Gryffindor Tower. He couldn't see very well, because his glasses had been splashed

with the stuff (making him glad for once that he had glasses – otherwise he'd probably be blind), and he didn't want to ruin his clothes by trying to clean it off his glasses with them. He was trying to wait until he got to the boys' bathroom near his dorm. He'd just rounded the corner away from the dungeon when two people surprised him.

“Hi, Harry,” said Hermione. We thought we’d meet you here. Are you alright?” The other person was Professor McGonagall.

“Miss Granger explained your plan, and while normally I wouldn’t approve, Professor Snape has gotten away with too much for too long, and Professor Dumbledore won’t do anything about it. Therefore, I decided to help. Let me see your hands, Mr. Potter.”

“Here they are.” He showed his palms to the two females. Hermione winced at the sight of all those burns.

“Excellent,” said Minerva. “I mean it’s terrible this happened, but excellent for our case. Let’s get you to the hospital wing, and we’ll be able to add Poppy’s report to our package. I’ve also added the complete list of house points that professor Snape has given and taken during his tenure here, as well as some memories of other students I’ve collected over the past few weeks.”

“Good idea,” said Harry with a grin.

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Harry wasn't surprised that the story on Snape didn't appear in the next day's Daily Prophet. He figured it would take at least a day to do some investigation. The down side was that he still had to put up with Snape and Malfoy, and he had another detention to serve. He and Hermione knew that if they were to pull a prank on both Draco and Snivellous, it would have to be today. However, it had to wait until after Harry's Saturday morning Quidditch practice, wherein the slave-driver known as Oliver Wood did his best to make sure everyone on the team hated Quidditch.



At lunch, Harry and Hermione saw the perfect opportunity. Draco got up from his table and walked to the staff table. He started to hand Snape a piece of parchment.

"That's probably the answer key to the test Snape plans to give us next week," said Harry.

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised," said his girlfriend. She looked at her watch. "It's now exactly 12:23."

Harry grinned evilly. "Perfect." The parchment in question suddenly became a glass full of a potion and spilled all over Snape, dissolving his clothes. Harry picked up his sandwich and took another bite. "I suppose we couldn't think of anything that would work better than that," he commented.

"Apparently not," agreed Hermione.

A furious Snape screeched, "DETENTION FOR A MONTH, MALFOY!!" calling attention to his situation. At this point, there was a huge hole in the front of his robes, revealing his hairless, pale chest. The whole crowd, Slytherins included, began laughing hysterically as the greasy git bolted from the room, leaving the arms of his robe behind.

"It was rather effective," commented Harry.

"And was certainly fair," agreed Hermione before taking a gulp of her pumpkin juice. They stared at each other for a few seconds longer before Harry burst out laughing with the others, followed a moment later by his girlfriend.

Once he caught his breath, Harry said, "We'd better hurry up and prepare."

Right after he said those words, Professor Dumbledore approached the table. "Good afternoon, Mr. Potter, Miss Granger."

"Good afternoon, Headmaster," the couple said together.

“Mr. Malfoy has implicated that you two had something to do with the unfortunate accident that Professor Snape suffered a few minutes ago.”

“If you’re going to accuse them, then I, as their Head of House, should be here, too,” said McGonagall as she approached. She was slightly flushed, indicating that she’d really been in a hurry.

“Naturally, Minerva,” said Albus, “you may be present while they are questioned.”

Harry looked at them, bringing up his Occlumency shields, which were improving, but wouldn’t withstand an all out assault. He was hoping Dumbledore wouldn’t try reading his mind. “Why does Malfoy think I had anything to do with that?”

“Because he claims that a switching spell was performed, and that a piece of parchment was replaced with a glass of the same potion you suffered an accident with yesterday.”

He looked at them incredulously while McGonagall asked, “That’s your proof? Fifty first-years handled that potion yesterday, and every other student has brewed it in their first year. Add to that the fact that a switching spell is too advanced for them and your accusation is absolutely ridiculous!”

“I haven’t performed a single spell today,” declared Harry.

“Neither have I,” said Hermione.

Minerva suggested, “Why don’t we settle this by performing Priori Incantatem on their wands?”

“An excellent suggestion, Minerva,” said Albus, who turned to the Gryffindor students. “Might I see your wands for a moment?”

“Sure, Professor, if it’ll clear this up so I can finish my lunch,” said Harry.

"It will." They both handed the headmaster their wands, and he performed the charm. "Well, this proves that they didn't do it. I'll let Mr. Malfoy know he was mistaken. Good afternoon." Both professors returned to the head table while Harry and Hermione returned to their lunches.

They quickly finished up and left the Great Hall, heading straight for their Common Room. "You wait here while I get the potion," Hermione instructed. "I'm glad that I thought to save some of it after what happened to you."

"Me, too," said Harry to her retreating back. Less than a minute later, she returned with a familiar cup. "Let's disillusion ourselves now so no one sees us with that."

Once they were invisible, they left the Common Room and headed back toward the Great Hall. Harry whispered, "You wanna bet that the parchment was a cheat sheet?"

"No," answered Hermione. "I'm sure it was, but we'll find out for sure, won't we?"

They snuck near a doorway of the Great Hall and waited for the right time. Harry pulled out his Time-Turner and put it around both their necks and gave the hourglass one turn, taking them back an hour. When they saw Draco approach Professor Snape, Hermione performed the switching spell and they both ran off to the Room of Requirement to stay out of the way for an hour.

"Was I right?" asked Harry after they were seated comfortably on a loveseat.

"Actually," said Hermione, "It's more than just an answer key. This is an actual test with the answers marked."

"Do you think the fact that Draco had to return it means that it's the original, and Snape hadn't made any copies yet?" asked Harry.

"I'm not sure," said Hermione, "But I'm willing to guess." She then performed an Incendio spell on the parchment, quickly burning it to ashes.

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That night, Harry grudgingly served his other detention with Filch, scrubbing the floors for two hours listening to the crazy squib praising the ‘old punishments.’ In the morning, however, the article that he’d been waiting for appeared in the Daily Prophet.

# Death Eater Routinely Insults and Assaults the Boy-Who-Lived at Hogwarts, While Dumbledore Looks the Other Way

By Rita Skeeter

According to Professor Dumbledore, Head of Slytherin House and Potions Master Severus Snape, is a former Death Eater who changed his ways before Harry Potter, the famed Boy-Who-Lived, defeated You-Know-Who. However, his record at Hogwarts, as well as several Pensieve memories provided by several students, including Young Mr. Potter, proves otherwise.

This reporter has seen with her own eyes the utter contempt that Mr. Snape showed Mr. Potter from the moment he first stepped into his classroom. Not only has he repeatedly insulted the Boy-Who-Lived, but has insulted the memory of his father, the late James Potter, another hero of our world. The only reason this reporter can think of for Mr. Snape to hold such hatred for the Potter family is that he is angry that they vanquished his master...

On and on the story went, taking up five pages, and ending with the account of Friday morning's incident with the Potion that Snape deliberately poured on Harry's clothes. It went over his punishments, including the burns he'd received (that Poppy had easily healed). It talked about how unfairly Snape handed out awards and punishments, using the actual records that were provided by the Deputy Headmistress. It talked about how blatantly he favored the Slytherins, and about the severe drop in the number of students to

pass their Potions OWLs, as well as the number of students who even took the Potions NEWTs, over the past decade.

Skeeter had even looked up Snape's criminal record, noting that he'd been accused of using an Unforgivable Curse but Dumbledore got him off without even a trial, claiming he'd turned spy. She strongly indicated that the headmaster was either a complete fool to trust Snape or Snape was blackmailing him, which indicated that Albus had something big to hide. The article called the citizens of the wizarding world, as well as the Board of Governors, to do something about the situation.

Harry noticed Dumbledore and Snape both glaring daggers at him and he smiled back at them. "You shouldn't go out of your way to make them even more angry," chastised Hermione, who was sitting next to him.

"Impossible," replied Harry. "Nothing could make them angrier..."

At that moment, about a hundred howlers arrived and flew to the head table – half going to the headmaster and the other half going to Snape. While they were enduring that, Harry said (actually yelled over the noise), “I can’t believe we haven’t seen anything in the paper about Wormtail or Padfoot yet.”

“Me, neither. Maybe we should write Kingsley.”

“Yeah, let’s do that tonight.”

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That night, they did send off a letter to Shackbolt, and the next morning – a Monday – they had a surprise. The Headmaster, as well as all four Heads of House, was not there. Professor Vector made an announcement that the Board of Governors was meeting with the missing staff, and that all Charms, Transfiguration, Herbology and Potions classes were cancelled for the day. This gave the first-year Gryffindors a free day, so Harry and Hermione decided to spend it hanging out with Neville, who they'd been accidentally ignoring for the

past few days. Harry definitely did want to make sure that Neville didn't feel too left out, even though they couldn't involve him in their secrets.

The next morning, Harry noticed with a grin that all the staff of Hogwarts was back with one exception. The Greasy Git wasn't there. Dumbledore stood up during breakfast to make an announcement.

"I'm afraid that I have some bad news. Due to certain erroneous complaints, Professor Snape has elected to pursue his life goals elsewhere, and therefore..." At this moment, the room exploded with applause. Everybody at three of the four house tables was standing up clapping and shouting for joy. Fred and George managed to set off some wet-start fireworks in celebration of this grand event. Obviously, they'd come prepared.

Shouts of, “NO MORE SNAPE!!” echoed throughout the room. Some of the staff, including McGonagall, found themselves accidentally joining in the chant. It was nearly ten minutes later when the room the room was settled down enough for the headmaster to continue his announcement.

"I'm sure Mr. Snape will be gratified to know how happy you are for him, how excited you are that he has chosen a new vocation – brewing potions to be sold in a store that will open soon in Diagon Alley. I will be taking over Potions lessons for the next week or so until I locate a new Potions master. I have already sent an owl to a few prospects, but not received a reply yet. Professor Vector will act as the Slytherin Head of House for the time being. That is all." He then sat back down and breakfast continued.

Before Harry had gotten too far in his meal, an owl dropped a note for him that was written with Dumbledore's loopy handwriting, telling him to see him after dinner.

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“Bertie Botts Every Flavor Beans,” said Harry, convincing the gargoyle guarding the entrance to Dumbledore’s office to move.

“Good luck,” said Hermione, who’d walked with him, but hadn’t been invited to this meeting. She kissed his cheek and walked off toward the library. Harry took a deep breath and walked up the stairs.

“Come in, Mr. Potter,” said the headmaster from the other side of the door. Harry opened it and walked in. “Have a seat. Would you like a lemon drop?”

Harry had always suspected that the candy was laced with something – perhaps just a calming draught or something worse – but had never been able to prove it. “Yes, please,” he said, and took the offered sweet. Instead of putting it in his mouth, he pretended to and slipped it into his pocket. “I suppose I’ll find out sooner or later, but why exactly did you ask for a meeting?”

With his eyes twinkling, and the most grandfatherly expression possible, he replied, “It’s just that you’ve been exhibiting certain characteristics that can be dangerous.”

‘Yeah, like thinking for myself,’ thought Harry. “Am I?” he simply asked.

“Yes. It seems that you are intolerant of others, and are using your fame to discredit those with whom you disagree. I must say I was quite disappointed with how you used the press to lash out at Professor Snape like that.”

“Really?” asked Harry, now getting angry. Dumbledore was trying to make him out to be the bad guy. His eyes narrowed as his face began getting red.

“Yes. Professor Snape might not be as friendly as Professor Flitwick, but that does not mean...”

Harry refused to listen to a fictional excuse for Snape’s behavior, especially as he remembered everything the man had done in both timelines. He interrupted Dumbledore by yelling, “I’ve put up with that kind of treatment all my life from the Dursleys – according to Hagrid it was your idea to put me there – and I’m NOT putting up with it

anymore! That person was supposed to be a teacher, but instead of teaching, all he seemed to be able to do is insult my father, me and the other Gryffindors and blatantly favor Slytherin! I tried letting you know, but obviously you don't care about the quality of education here! I don't know if you're Snape's lover or what, but you're supposed to be a headmaster, but you've proven to me that you don't deserve that title! I wonder how many other teachers you have working here for personal reasons that have nothing to do with education!"

Calmly, the Headmaster replied, although Harry could swear he paled for a moment at that last statement. "I do care about the quality of education here, and I'll not have an eleven-year-old accusing me otherwise. I'm afraid that this sort of insubordination calls for punishment. I am removing ten points from Gryffindor and assigning you a detention. You are dismissed. Professor McGonagall will see you about your detention."

"Goodbye, sir," said Harry civilly before walking out the door. He was surprised to find Hermione waiting for him. "Hi, Hermione. I thought you'd be in the library."

"I couldn't concentrate. How did it go?"

"He said he was disappointed in me for not tolerating Snape; I yelled at him and he gave me a detention."

"Oh, dear. How do you feel?"

"I'm still a bit angry. I thought I'd go to the Room of Requirement to clear my head. Want to come?"

"Sure," she replied. Within a few minutes, they were sitting on a loveseat talking about the sacking of Severus Snape. Hermione asked Harry, "Why didn't we do that before? It was so simple."

"Because at the time, we completely trusted Dumbledore and worshipped the ground he walked on..."

"I suppose," she agreed.



“...We praised the toilet he...”

“That’s enough, Harry,” she interrupted, making it clear that she did not want him to finish that statement.

He closed his mouth before getting another idea. “Maybe at Order meetings they sang songs about him.”

“I highly doubt that,” she replied.

Harry then started making up new words for one of the few hymns he knew. He’d heard it on the tele a few times when Dudley left it on in the middle of the night while he was living in his cupboard.

“Oh, Dumbledore

When I in awesome wonder

Consider all the plans thy mind hath made

Thou hast founded

The Order of the Phoenix

And let us do everything thou hast said

Then sings my soul, my headmaster to thee

How great thou art, how great thou art

Then sings my soul, my headmaster to thee

How great thou art, how great thou art”

At first, Hermione was scowling at him, but by the time he got to the chorus, singing in his worst possible voice, she was laughing her head off, making it difficult for him to finish.

“The sad thing is,” said Hermione between giggles, “is that many people really feel that way.”

"I know," agreed Harry.

After they'd laughed together for a few moments, Hermione's expression turned serious. "I think it's time to go after the other Death Eaters."

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Please review. Thank you to those who have.

P.S. I hope I haven't offended anyone with my alternative lyrics to the hymn, 'How Great Thou Art.' I didn't mean any disrespect for that classic Gospel song – I'm just using it to illustrate how the Order seems to revere Dumbledore like a god rather than just respect him as a leader. The difference being that they seem to believe he's infallible and no one should ever question his decisions.

## Chapter Nine – Barty Crouch Jr.

Throughout the next week, Harry and Hermione half-expected to see Horace Slughorn show up at breakfast, but surprisingly, he never did. They both had to admit that they enjoyed the first Potions lesson that Dumbledore, who was an alchemist and had worked with Nicolas Flamel, taught.

“Good morning, class,” he said jovially, with a twinkle in his eyes. “It has been a long time since I actually got to teach. As headmaster, I find myself too busy with other responsibilities to actually do what I enjoy most – teaching. Today, we will be learning about the potion used to reduce pain when rubbed on your skin. Does anybody know what it’s called?” It was no great surprise to the class when Hermione raised her hand. Harry smiled to himself over the fact of that one quality that did not change in his girlfriend over the years. “Yes, Miss Granger?”

“It must be the poena macero potion. The other possibility, the excrucio macero potion is stronger, but far too complex for anything less than a N.E.W.T. level class.”

“That is correct, Miss Granger. Five points to Gryffindor.” He then pointed his wand at the blackboard, which suddenly had the instructions listed. “Who can tell me the attributes of the first ingredient?”

The class went on like that, so for the first fifteen minutes, the class discussed the potion and its ingredients, so that they actually learned something about the potion they were brewing as opposed to just following instructions. Dumbledore did give points to the few Slytherins who were able to answer his questions. Draco Malfoy was not among those. He just sat there silently with a scowl on his face until it was time to start brewing. Harry was surprised that Neville had answered some of the questions about the ingredients.

Harry was cutting up his first ingredient when he heard Professor Dumbledore’s jovial voice. “Mr. Malfoy, would you be so kind as to explain why you are emptying that bottle of completed poena macero into your cauldron?”

Harry grinned as Draco paled. “I, er, made it earlier today.”

In a friendly tone, Dumbledore said while walking up to Malfoy, “Then the package I saw you receive this morning from Antonio’s Apothecary has absolutely nothing to do with it? And the fact that the bottle in your hand has their logo clearly printed on it is just a coincidence?”

“Er, I just had the bottle from a long time ago and...”

“I see.” Dumbledore took the container from him. “Since you are an expert brewer of this potion, I’d like to observe your process first hand. Perhaps I will learn a new trick or two.” The whole class chuckled at the way the headmaster sounded completely sincere, yet made it obvious to everyone that he knew Draco was planning on cheating. Harry went back to chopping ingredients and managed a nearly perfect light blue potion, whereas Draco’s ended up looking like tar.

“I always suspected that Malfoy had cheated his way through Potions class, and now we have the proof,” said Harry as he and his girlfriend walked out of class with Neville.

“Always?” the Longbottom heir asked. “We’ve only been here a bit more than a month.”

Harry and Hermione looked at each other for a moment before Harry said, “That’s what I meant. For this whole month, I’ve thought he was always cheating. I don’t think he ever does his own work – not just in Potions. That’s why it was so easy to beat him in that duel. He’s all talk.”

“Yeah,” agreed Neville. “I doubt he’s much smarter than those goons he hangs out with. What are their names?”

“Crabbe and Goyle,” answered Hermione. “By the way, I noticed that your potion looked better than Harry’s today.” The Boy-Who-Lived glared at her for a second.

Neville blushed as he answered, “Potions is actually pretty easy if you understand the ingredients. It’s just that before, with Snape breathing down my neck...”

"Say no more," said Harry. "We all understand."

“Anyway, since we actually talked about the ingredients, I realized that we’ve worked with most of them in Herbology, and the few we haven’t studied are in the next few chapters of the book.”

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It was the next day that Harry finally saw a new face at the head table. It was a fairly attractive middle-aged woman with black curly hair that went just past her shoulders. She had blue eyes and brown skin and was wearing light purple robes. Professor Dumbledore stood up to make an announcement.

“Good morning, everyone. I’d like to introduce our new Potions Mistress – Felicity Brewster. As Professor Brewster is a Gryffindor Alumni, Professor Vector will continue on as the Head of Slytherin.” The Gryffindors were cheering loudly while everyone else was politely clapping. Draco looked like Christmas had been cancelled for the year.

A few minutes after the announcement, Harry received an owl that left a letter that read:

Dear Mr. Potter,

Headmaster Dumbledore has asked me to oversee the detention he assigned you during your meeting with him last week. Please report to my office after dinner tonight to serve it.

Professor McGonagall

“What do you think she’ll have you do?” asked Hermione when she read the note.



Snape. I hope that you haven't already developed a hatred for Hogwarts."

He chuckled a bit. "No, I haven't. Hogwarts just needed a house-cleaning." He then looked thoughtful. "I wonder if anything can be done about Binns. No one ever learns anything in his class, either."

"Professor Binns has been teaching at Hogwarts for longer than any other staff member, and has no record of bullying or otherwise harassing students. It would be rather difficult to get him sacked solely because his lectures are less than captivating."

"I understand," replied Harry.

"Very good." She sighed. "All that I've mentioned being true, plus the fact that Professor Dumbledore was unreasonably stubborn regarding Mr. Snape does not negate the fact that you were insubordinate to the headmaster. You must at least respect his position."

Harry sighed, remembering how at different points in the previous timeline both Umbridge and Snape had served in Dumbledore's position at Hogwarts. "I don't respect positions – just people. If someone behaves in a manner that I respect, then they have my respect. If they abuse their position, then they don't have my respect." He sighed. "Snape obviously abused his position, and I believe that the Headmaster was abusing his by insisting that Snape continue on here no matter how many students, parents and staff members disagreed. It's like he was dictator here and was going to have his way no matter who didn't like it." Harry then added, "He didn't even care what his Deputy Headmistress thought."

Minerva seemed to be silently agreeing with his statements, although Harry knew she'd never admit it. Finally, after a few seconds of silence, she replied. "You speak much more like an adult than a child."

"I haven't really been a child since Dumbledore abandoned me on the Dursleys' porch," he replied sadly.

Her face paled slightly. "That day, I watched your family as a cat and tried to talk the headmaster out of leaving you there." She seemed hesitant, but pressed on like a true Gryffindor. "How bad is it with them?"

Harry decided that bluntness was the best approach, but truthfully had never really told anyone but Hermione about his time with his 'family.' Even then, he only skimmed over to worst parts. He took a deep breath, deciding to start with a simple fact. "You may or may not know it, but my first Hogwarts letter was addressed to 'the cupboard under the stairs.'"

"What?" she asked, clearly shocked.

He nodded nervously, taking another breath, while beginning to feel a slight stinging sensation behind his eyes. "Th-that's because that was my bedroom." He blinked his eyes, realizing that tears were actually threatening to come. He thought he'd done enough crying for his lifetime while locked alone in his cupboard, and hadn't cried in years. "My cousin Dudley had two rooms to himself while I was locked in a cupboard, and only let out when they had chores for me to do while their baby whale sat in front of the tele!" Now, he wasn't just feeling self-pity; he was feeling rage that he'd suppressed for years. He half-yelled, "I didn't know my name or birthday until they had to send me to school. I was always called 'Boy,' or 'Freak' and told my parents were drunks who died in a car crash."

She looked down at her desk, obviously battling her own emotions. "Hagrid mentioned that last part to me," she said softly. She looked thoughtful for a moment before continuing, "Will you be alright spending the summer with them?"

He shrugged his shoulders and closed his eyes, trying to get his emotions back under control. "I'm not sure. We came to a deal last summer after I met Hagrid. They want me to find other arrangements for this summer, and to tell you the truth, I'd just as soon never see them again."

Sighing heavily, Minerva said, "That'll be all. Your detention is over." With a slight smirk, she added, "If anybody asks, I had you scrubbing



the floor of the Transfiguration classroom until you passed out in exhaustion.”

He grinned at her. “Thanks, Professor McGonagall.”

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The next morning at breakfast, a brown owl flew in with the rest of the mail and landed in front of Harry. He gave it a piece of bacon before relieving it of its rolled up parchment. He carefully held it so that only he could read it, mainly because he didn’t want Neville or anyone else to see it. He’d tell Hermione what it said later.

Tox

I hope this letter reaches you, since I doubt ‘Tox’ is your real name.

As requested, I made a few inquiries regarding Pettigrew and found out that he’s been put in Azkaban, but they’re still ‘investigating’ his case and identity. Barty Crouch originally threw Sirius Black into prison without a trial and it seems like he’s using his influence to delay proving that he was wrong and literally stole ten years from an innocent man’s life because he didn’t follow proper procedure. I’ve been assured that they will eventually conduct a trial, but I had the distinct feeling that the person speaking was trying to pacify me.

I’ll let you know any new developments.

Auror Shacklebolt

P.S. Write me back so that I at least know that this parchment addressed to ‘Tox’ reached you.

Harry frowned as he read most of the letter, but smiled at the end. He had performed a particular spell that caused owls to recognize him as both Harry Potter and Tox, the Marauder name he’d given to himself. He sighed as he thought about the rest of the letter. The more he thought about the evil actions of Barty Crouch, the better he felt about his and Hermione’s plan.

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On Thursday morning, after breakfast, Harry and Hermione disguised and disillusioned themselves and made their way to the One-Eyed Witch passage. As before, once they were clear of Hogwarts' anti-apparition field, they popped away.

They popped in (while still invisible) outside of a house that they'd had to previously locate on a map. They were glad that Crouch Manor was plotable. The young couple gazed at the three-story mansion made of white brick. It was very elegant-looking to Harry. He pulled a previously written note out of his pocket and said, "It's time for phase one."

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On the pristine floor of the kitchen, a small figure was on her hands and knees scrubbing the floor until it practically glowed. The house-elf appeared to enjoy her work, and was hardly paying any attention to her environment because her master would punish her if everything wasn't exactly perfect. She didn't notice the great horned owl flying in through the window until it hooted at her.

The elf turned around and saw the beautiful bird with mostly brown and white feathers looking at her with its wide eyes. It had a small note tied to its leg. "Master isn't being here to get the note," said the elf, causing the owl to fly closer and move its leg so that the servant could read whom the note was addressed to.

## The Crouch Family Elf

“That is being Winky,” she said before untying the scroll. “Winky isn’t ever receiving post before.” She unrolled it and continued reading.

Mr. Crouch is feeling a bit under the weather, and has requested that his elf purchase some pepper-up potion at an apothecary and bring it to him at the Ministry.

Percival Weatherby

Winky looked terrified. "Master is ill! Master is ill! Winky must be helping him!" With that, she popped off. The owl flew to the window and hooted once.

One minute later, Harry and Hermione were standing in the bedroom where Death Eater Barty Crouch, Jr. was lying. Harry had pulled the invisibility cloak off of the fugitive and saw that he was lying perfectly still, under the effects of Crouch Sr.'s spells. He handed the cloak to Hermione. "Here. Hold onto this and go to the other room. There's no reason you need to see this."

She took his left hand with her right while stuffing the cloak into a pocket with her other hand. "We're in this together. If you're doing wrong, then we both are. We know what this Death Eater has done, and what he wants to do. The Ministry can't keep criminals in Azkaban, so this is the only way to make sure they can't hurt anyone else."

Taking a deep breath, he pointed his Yew wand at Barty Crouch, Junior's throat. "Sectumsempra." Harry had aimed so that death was instantaneous and painless. "Let's get..."

Pop!

Harry turned to see a house-elf with the most enraged expression he'd ever imagined. "You's killed Young Master!" she shouted at the two cloaked strangers before holding out her hand.

BOOM!! Both figures found themselves thrown into the wall, the wind knocked out of them. Harry knew he'd be bruised up and guessed the same was true of Hermione, who was holding her ribcage and appeared to be in tremendous pain. He pointed his wand at the mad elf. "Stupefy!"

She dodged it and sent another spell toward Hermione. He grabbed his girlfriend and pulled her out of the way, with her screaming obscenities at him the whole time. He wondered if her ribs were

broken. Harry didn't want to hurt Winky seriously, but he had to defend himself (as well as his girlfriend), so he shouted, "Reducto!" while pointing his wand at the floor in front of the elf. The floor broke open, causing the elf to lose her footing. "Stupefy!" he shouted again. This time, he caught the house-elf in the chest, knocking her out. Harry picked up and carried Hermione quickly to the door and apparated as soon as they were clear of the house's defenses, glancing at his watch before disappearing with a small pop.

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They reappeared inside the poorly-lit tunnel beneath Honeydukes, and Harry could finally take the time to examine his love, who was crying in pain. During their months dodging Voldemort, he had learned a basic healing spell that would mend bones, but not heal the surrounding muscle and flesh. The result was that the person could move, but was in some pain. He performed the spell on Hermione.

“Thanks,” she said. “I think my ribs are alright and nothing was permanently damaged.” She got up and winced. “I’ll be in a bit of pain for a few days, but I should be alright.”

“Winky sure packed quite a wallop,” he commented before putting his arm around her. “Let’s get to class. Once we’re at the passage, we’ll see how much time we need to make.”

Upon arriving at the exit of their passage, Harry glanced at his watch, lighting the display so he could read it. He said, "If we go back two hours, we'll have plenty of time," as he put the necklace around both of them.

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Hermione was walking a bit slower than usual, but otherwise seemed normal. Harry was walking slightly behind her, ready to catch her just in case she had a problem. They made their way into the Transfiguration classroom just in time and took their seats. The professor walked up to the front of the class and began to take role.

When she got to Hermione, she paused and stared at her face for a few seconds before asking, “Miss Granger, how did you get that bruise on your cheek?”

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Please review. Thank you to those who have.



Immediately after class, Harry and Hermione went to the owlry, where Hedwig flew directly to Harry.

“Hi, girl, it’s great to see you,” he said, stroking her feathers. “I was wondering if you would mind carrying a letter from Hermione to her parents.”

The owl moved her head down a bit, nodding in the affirmative. “Thanks, Hedwig,” said Hermione, pulling a note out of her pocket and tying it to her leg. He then took the Time-Turner off his neck and put it around Hermione’s before giving her a quick peck on the lips. “Here you go. Do I need to explain how to use it?”

“Not hardly.”

As soon as the snowy owl flew away, Harry commented, “I wish I’d realized that all I had to do to keep her happy was to send Hedwig off with another letter whenever I wanted to use a different owl for something important.” He turned to his girlfriend. “Are you ready?”

In response, Hermione grinned and closed her eyes in concentration. Harry watched as the love of his life morphed into a beautiful great horned owl with brown and white feathers.

“I wish my form could fly,” commented Harry as he tied a note to Wings’ leg. The pretty owl seemed to smirk at him. “Just remember to get it to Kingsley at exactly 9:43. That way he’ll be too late to interfere with us and too early for Barty Sr. to hide his son’s body. The owl nodded and flew away, stopping to peck him lightly on the cheek.

Once Wings was out of sight, Harry turned around and walked out of the owlry, opening the door to run into, “Hermione. I’ll never get used to this. How’d it go?”

She glanced around to make sure no one could see and gave him a peck on the lips. “Perfectly,” she said happily. “I even watched Shackbolt pour veritaserum down Winky’s throat.” She paused, frowning. “I wonder what’s going to happen to her.”

“Probably get the sack,” said Harry, shrugging. “She’ll manage like she did last time. Maybe I’ll see if I can hire her in awhile if she hasn’t found a new master, once this mess is cleared up.”

Hermione sighed, “I suppose she’d never accept pay, and would be insulted if you offered it.”

“Yeah,” he said, nodding. “You won’t hold that against me, will you?”

“No,” she sighed. “I understand.” Then, changing the subject, she said, “Hopefully, without Crouch around, Sirius will be set free.”

“Hopefully,” he echoed her.

They then walked together toward their next class, chatting amicably, when they were accosted by three hoodlums.

“Ah, Potter and the Mudblood,” declared Draco. “I should congratulate you, Potty. You finally started to give the Mudblood what she deserves.” He indicated her bruise, and then motioned to Crabbe and Goyle. “Maybe we can add more bruises.”

Harry and Hermione were both summoning their special wands out of their invisible holsters when a female voice called out from behind them. “Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle! Twenty points from Slytherin – EACH! Along with five detentions each with Mr. Filch!”

Harry grinned as he watched Professor Vector, the new Head of Slytherin, discipline her students.

“You are a disgrace to the Slytherin House! I don’t know what Snape taught you, but when I was a student, the Slytherins weren’t a bunch of arrogant bullies trying to pick fights with people! By the way, you may not have noticed it, but Potter and Granger already had their wands in their hands, ready to curse you three into oblivion, and I just saved you a trip to the hospital wing! Ten points to Gryffindor for being prepared.”



“Thank you, Professor,” said Harry, barely suppressing his laughter at the look on Draco’s face as he saw that they did indeed have their wands at the ready.

“Goodbye, Draco,” said Hermione as she and her unofficial boyfriend walked off. Once they were out of earshot, they laughed heartily at Draco, Crabbe and Goyle’s predicament, realizing that Vector was right about them being a disgrace to the house known for producing clever people. They knew that Tom Riddle would never have acted like Draco Malfoy. Not to excuse Snape in any way, but they did realize that whatever evil things he did, he had managed to effectively dumb down the Slytherin house. They just wondered if it was on purpose, or just an unintended side-affect of his excesses.

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The next morning, Harry and Hermione had made sure they would receive the Daily Prophet, and were not disappointed in the article Rita Skeeter wrote. Above a picture of Barty Crouch Sr. sitting bound to a chair in courtroom ten was the headline:

Bartemius Crouch sentenced to the Dementor's Kiss for heinous crimes!

By Rita Skeeter

Some of you may remember that the Head of the Department of International Magical Cooperation Barty Crouch had a son who turned out to be a Death Eater who participated in multiple crimes in You-Know-Who's service and supposedly died in Azkaban.

Yesterday morning, Senor Auror Kingsley Shacklebolt discovered evidence that proved...

The article went on to describe how Jr. was broken out of Azkaban and was recently killed. Fudge had hurried up the Crouch trial in an effort to stop the press from finding out, but apparently Skeeter had been buzzing around the Ministry at the time and got the story. For a change, she didn't have to make things up to keep the story as cruel

and vindictive as possible. The article did mention that the elf was given clothes throughout the process, though she didn't go into any details about that, so Harry decided what he would do later that day.

Harry and Hermione were alone in the Room of Requirement when Harry called out, "Winky the House Elf, can you hear me?"

Nothing happened for about ten seconds. Harry was about to call a school elf to help him contact Winky when she popped into existence with a very loud noise. She was crying and trembling as she held onto a glove that had obviously been given to her the day before. "You is calling Winky," she sobbed, "the disgraced elf who couldn't protect Young Master?"

Harry knelt in front of her. "Not a disgraced elf. The noble elf of a once great family that has recently disgraced itself. It wasn't your fault." Harry was relieved that Winky didn't seem to realize that he was the one who'd killed Barty Jr.

"No. Master is a good wizard."

"He's not your master anymore," interrupted Harry while Hermione silently watched. "I'm Harry Potter. Would you like me to become your new master?" he asked gently.

Winky looked completely flabbergasted as she gazed into Harry's face. "You...you wants Winky?"

He grinned at the hopefulness in her eyes. "Only if you want to be my elf."

"Winky does. WINKY DOES!!"

"Then, how do you become my elf?" he asked, not sure if there was some kind of ritual.

"You is taking Winky's right hand." He obeyed. "Now, you is saying 'Winky is my elf.'"

"Winky is my elf."

“Harry Potter is my master,” the elf said solemnly, and then a white ball of light formed where their hands met and flashed for a moment, bathing the entire room in bright light before it was gone in a blink. “Now, we is bonded. What is master wanting?”

"First," said Harry, "I want to introduce you to my friend, Hermione Granger. You will obey her like you would me." After a moment, he added, "Unless she contradicts me," causing Hermione to stick her tongue out at him before smirking.

"It is being an honor to be meeting Harry Potter's Grangy."

"I'm glad to meet you as well, Winky."

Harry then said, "While I'm here at Hogwarts, there won't be that much for you to do, so I suggest you work with the other elves in the kitchens for the time being. I'll call you whenever I have a specific task for you to do."

“Oh,” added Hermione. “If it’s possible, don’t tell anyone who your master is. He’s kind of famous and doesn’t want other people to know about his personal business.”

“Winky understands,” she said, after seeing Harry nod in agreement. She then popped away.

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The weeks passed quickly after that, with still no definitive word about Sirius or Pettigrew, despite Mr. Crouch being taken out of the picture. The only thing Kingsley could reply to their inquiries was that Fudge was taking the suggestion for Black and Pettigrew's trial under advisement. Shacklebolt went as far as to suggest that if they planned anything illegal, that though he'd be sympathetic, he wanted absolutely nothing to do with it, and didn't want to know about it.

When Halloween arrived, Hermione found herself paired up with Ron Weasley for the Charms lesson in which Flitwick went over the

levitation spell. However, this time Hermione didn't comment on Ron's failures as she did last time, knowing that he wouldn't take it well. Both Harry and Hermione also waited until someone else performed the spell before they did. Consequently, Ron didn't make any comments about Hermione being an absolute nightmare. Harry had already fixed it so no one could say she didn't have any friends. They were happy to note that Neville had performed the spell before class was dismissed.

The feast that night was wonderfully uninterrupted, so the young couple, who were sitting next to Neville, was able to enjoy the feast, as well as the decorations. However, although neither would admit it, both were expecting trouble that never came.

After that, Harry and Hermione decided to target other free Death Eaters that they knew were murderers. These people had bribed and lied their way out of Azkaban and joined up with Voldemort the moment he returned. Harry and Hermione knew that the way to stop the proverbial dog from biting you on Monday was to kill the dog on Sunday, so they knew their mission, and began making plans while covertly observing the patterns of their targets using their Time Turner and Invisibility cloak.

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“Nervous?” questioned Oliver Wood as the Gryffindor team, including Harry, approached the pitch. It was November 9th, and they were about to face Slytherin.

“A little,” Harry replied, though he wasn’t nearly as nervous as he had been the first time he’d played this game. He was fairly certain that no one would enchant his broom this time, but was ready for it anyway. Minutes before, Hermione had reminded him to catch the Snitch with his hands this time, instead of his mouth.

"I was nervous during my first game, too."

This time, Harry didn't ask Oliver what happened. He'd learned his lesson the last time. After his final instruction to catch the Snitch or die trying, Harry mounted his broom.

"Welcome to the first Quidditch match of the year," announced Lee Jordan, "Gryffindor versus Slytherin!"

The teams were then announced and the balls released. Angelina Johnson got the Quaffle first. "...what an excellent Chaser that girl is, and rather attractive, too."

"JORDAN!"

"Sorry, Professor."

That's about the only thing that happened exactly the way that Harry remembered it. He was glad to see that Quidditch matches were too random to repeat. All that it took to change them was for one person, even if it was himself, to fly in a different direction, and the whole game is changed.

However, one thing remained the same – Gryffindor destroying Slytherin. Oliver was definitely on his game that day as he blocked everything shot at him. Not that he had that many opportunities, since the Gryffindor Chasers were dominating the pitch.

When the score was fifty to zero, Harry noticed the Golden Snitch just above the Slytherin Keeper's head. At the same time, Katie Bell, Quaffle in hand, was approaching that goal. Harry noticed the Slytherin Beaters close together taking aim at her, so he aimed himself and shot in between the two, distracting them long enough for Katie to shoot. At the same time, Harry zoomed to the left hoop, reaching out his hand.

"She scores!" shouted Lee. "Sixty to zero!" The crowd was still cheering when Harry raised his fist in victory. "Is that?" Jordan said. "It is! HARRY POTTER HAS CAUGHT THE SNITCH!!" He was jumping up and down in the stands with McGonagall sitting next to him, shaking her head in embarrassment. "Gryffindor skunks the Slytherins – two hundred ten to nothing!! What a debut for Potter!"



It was the same day, in fact during the Quidditch match (thanks to the Time Turner) when Harry and Hermione (under the Crouch Invisibility cloak) followed Goyle Sr. to a muggle neighborhood. They silently observed him walk into a muggle cinema for a matinee showing of what would definitely be considered a 'chick flick.' Hermione insisted that they pay for tickets before sneaking into the film under the cloak (so they wouldn't be spotted by Goyle). Hermione was enjoying the movie while Harry watched their target pull his wand out and point it at the attractive woman sitting alone in front of him. He tapped Hermione's shoulder in time for them both to hear the word, "Imperio," muttered before the victim's eyes glazed over.

They were silently revolted as they watched the woman stand up and leave with Goyle following her. Hermione muttered, "I was enjoying this movie," as they followed Goyle from a distance.

"We'll watch it later," Harry hissed as he hurried her.

Once they went outside, it didn't take a genius to see they were headed straight for a hotel on the other side of the street.

"That monster!" hissed Hermione as her face turned red. "He's probably been doing this for years!"

"I'm sure he has," muttered Harry.

"She's wearing a wedding ring," Hermione said as Harry got his wand out of its holster.

"Let me do it," she asked, with a scary expression on her face. Without saying a word, Harry replaced his wand back where it was stored. "Keep your eyes out for muggles."

"The coast is clear," whispered Harry after taking a look to see no one was paying attention.

Goyle stepped onto the street to cross it when Hermione performed a powerful banishing charm on a parked car he was directly in front of. It moved forward at about one hundred kilometers per hour for the three feet between it and Goyle Senior, before ramming into him. His

now broken body was hurled about ten feet and fell to the ground. The woman's glazed expression turned into confusion. She looked around and started walking as fast as she could toward the theater, while putting her credit card back into her purse, wondering why she'd removed it. A crowd began to form around the bloody mess that used to be Goyle.

“He’s dead!” someone shouted after feeling for a pulse.

"I hope the person who owns that car has insurance," Harry muttered.

"I'm sure they do," said Hermione before putting her wand away. "She had her credit card out."

“Probably to pay for the room,” said Harry.

Hermione looked even madder. "But don't you realize...when they get their bill...she'd never be able to keep it secret from her husband!"

Harry, having caught on, was now as angry as Hermione. “He’d divorce her for having an affair.”

"I'm just glad we stopped him," she said, obviously trying to calm down. "Now, we need to see that movie again."

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Harry and Hermione almost felt guilty when they saw how devastated Gregory Goyle was after being informed of his father's death, but they knew that they'd made the world a better place – with one less rapist/murderer. A few days later, Hermione determined that the lemon drop Harry had taken from Dumbledore did indeed have a mild calming draught mixed into it. They were relieved that it wasn't anything stronger.

Goyle was the first of many Death Eaters that would meet with fatal 'accidents' over the next year. Early in December, Walden Macnair suffered an 'accident' when a beast he was supposed to kill apparently killed him. Harry and Hermione planned that the



executions would occur under very different, unpredictable circumstances, and very few people noticed the pattern, or even suspected they were anything besides accidents. However, one person did.

Professor Dumbledore was in his office speaking with his Deputy Headmistress. "I'm going to have to put Severus under a Fidelius Charm. Barty Crouch Jr., Goyle, Macnair. All of these deaths have led me to one conclusion. There is a very clever vigilante out there who is killing the Death Eaters who escaped Azkaban."

Minerva commented, "I don't think there's any reason to interfere with his work. He's not giving them anything less than they deserve."

Sighing, Albus said, "I reluctantly agree with you, and hate to admit that I feel better with them off the street. Therefore, I decided not to inform the Minister of my suspicions." He took a deep breath. "However, it is quite conceivable that this vigilante will group Severus with the rest. Therefore, I must do what I can to protect him."

"I understand."

"Now, onto other matters. Is Mr. Potter returning to his relatives for the holidays, or is he staying here?"

"Actually," she replied. "He informed me that he has accepted an invitation to spend the holidays with the Grangers."

Frowning, Dumbledore replied, "That's not good."

"Why ever not?" asked Minerva, now appearing angry.

"It's not safe there."

"Safe from what?"

"Death Eaters," he answered as though it were obvious. "I must put a stop to it."

“You’ll do no such thing, Albus! First of all, the Death Eaters won’t even know Harry is there, and secondly, they’re probably too worried about this vigilante to bother with Harry Potter.”

“But...”

“I know you’ve already had harsh words with him, but you will NOT interfere with his friendships! He’s told me some of what the Dursleys put him through, and we both know I warned you about them! Finally, he’s finding a bit of happiness, and I will not have you ruin it!”

Sighing, Dumbledore relented. “Very well. I will not interfere with his Christmas plans, but he will have to return to the Dursleys this summer.”

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it," she replied.

“Yes, we will.”

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Please review. Thank you to those who have.

## Chapter Eleven – Christmas with the Grangers

Harry smiled to himself as he did something he hadn't done in the original timeline during first year. In fact, the only time he'd ever done this was during his sixth year. He boarded the Hogwarts Express to leave the castle for the Christmas holidays. During fifth year, he'd ridden a portkey to Grimmauld Place, but that just wasn't the same.

He actually had planned on staying at the castle until a few days before McGonagall was to collect the names of those staying for the holidays.

Harry was adding more scrambled eggs to his plate at breakfast when Hedwig arrived in the Great Hall and flew directly to Hermione. He glanced up and saw her untying a note from his owl's leg. "Is that from your parents?" he asked.

"Yes. Thanks again for letting me borrow Hedwig."

"It's no problem. I'm sure she enjoys the exercise," he replied while his girlfriend gave a piece of bacon to Hedwig. "Besides, I don't have anyone to write out there."

She quickly opened the letter and looked it over, letting out a small squeak as she grinned broadly.

"What is it?" he asked, smiling at her obvious glee.

"I asked, and they said YES!" Hedwig flew off her shoulder and onto Harry's, apparently scared by this display of emotion. He began absentmindedly petting her.

Harry was confused. As much as he tried, he couldn't imagine what she was talking about. "Asked what?"

"If you could spend Christmas with us," she said happily. "They said yes!"

He was genuinely surprised. "Y-you asked them..."

“You didn’t think I’d let you spend Christmas all alone here, did you?”

“I, I just didn’t think...”

Under the table, she took his hand in hers and lowered her voice. “Harry, you know I wouldn’t want you to be alone. Don’t you want to spend Christmas with me?”

“Of course,” he replied.

“Good. Then I’ll send them a note to expect you.” She then whispered in his ear, “It’ll be our first Christmas as a couple.”

He smirked and whispered back, “Yet, not a couple.”

It was a few days later that McGonagall, knowing about his situation at home, asked him if he was staying for the holidays. She seemed absolutely delighted that he had someplace to spend Christmas.

Neville, Harry and Hermione boarded the train and quickly found a compartment and settled in. Hermione quickly pulled out her wand and pointed it at the doorway, which glowed for a second while Harry was asking Neville about a plant to distract him. What she’d done is put what she called a ‘Slytherin ward’ on the door, but didn’t want Neville to know she could do spells of the level that she’d done – especially since she’d done it silently. Once the spell was cast, Hermione joined the conversation.

“So, you’re saying that Devil’s Snare can be useful in certain circumstances?” she asked him.

“Absolutely,” said Neville. “It can help defend a house, keeping out undesirables like...” At that moment, the door opened, revealing Crabbe, Goyle, and of course their leader, “Malfoy.”

“Longbottom, how can a pureblood like you stand sitting in the same compartment as that mudblood?” he sneered as he stepped inside. “It’s bad enough with Potter being a half...What’s happening?” The three Slytherins’ skin started to turn green while their hair turned silver. At the same time, they began to develop a terrible odor, but

fortunately, the wards pushed them all out the door forcefully, before closing it.

All three Gryffindors began laughing their heads off, and Harry could hear some laughter coming from outside the door as well. Obviously, the three stooges had been spotted.

"What did you do to them?" asked Neville, once he'd regained enough composure to ask the question.

"Just brought out their Slytherin side a bit," said Hermione.

"Yeah, but what kind of spell does that?"

"It was in a book I picked up last summer," lied Harry. "I couldn't do it, but Hermione managed it somehow. She's really brilliant."

"I guess she's not at the top of our class for nothing," said Neville, accepting the story.

"But don't tell anyone about it," charged Harry. "We don't want to get in trouble."

"No problem, mate."

--HP--

"Hello, Hermione!" said Mrs. Granger happily as she pulled her daughter into her arms. "I missed you!" Harry stood in the background watching this reunion.

"I missed you, too, mum," the girl muttered, holding her mother tightly. Hermione did her best to hold back the tears as she embraced the woman who'd been murdered about a year before she and Harry went back in time. "I love you," she added in a whisper.

"I love you, too, Hermione," the woman replied.

"Don't I get a hug?" came a man's voice from beside them.

"Of course, daddy," Hermione replied, letting go of her mother to embrace her father, who'd suffered the same fate as his wife in the previous timeline. Harry was able to see a lone tear making its way down his girlfriend's cheek.

He grinned broadly as thought, 'This is why we went back in time.'

"Hello, Harry," said Mrs. Granger, pulling him out of his thoughts, as she held out her hand to shake his. "You've been in every letter Hermione has sent us. Thanks for being such a good friend to her."

"It's been my privilege," he replied with a grin. "Thanks for inviting me over for Christmas."

"Thank you for letting Hermione use your gorgeous owl to write us."

"Hedwig likes the exercise." He turned to the cage he was holding. "Don't you, girl." She hooted affirmatively, causing Mrs. Granger to chuckle a bit.

"You are an intelligent girl, aren't you?" Hedwig nodded in agreement.

"Good to see you again, Harry," said Mr. Granger, before shaking his hand. "We'd better get going."

--HP--

Before long, Harry and Hermione were sitting in the back of a silver BMW, with the adult Grangers in the front. "So, Hermione," said her father, "You haven't written much about the new Potions teacher. The one who replaced that git...What's his name? Snake?"

"I believe it was Snape," corrected Mrs. Granger.

"Yeah," grumbled Harry. "That's his name."

"I understand he was especially cruel to you, Harry."

"Yes, sir."

"I'm just glad you were able to get rid of him," said Mrs. Granger.

"Me, too," said Hermione. "How are things going at the practice?"

Mr. and Mrs. Granger exchanged a quick look that didn't go unnoticed by the kids. "It's been busy."

"Are you still having problems with Mr. Thorn?"

"Not anymore. He dropped the case. How do you know about that?" asked her father.

Hermione looked nervous, suddenly, and Harry realized that his girlfriend was using information her parents hadn't given her yet. "Er," she eloquently stated, "You mentioned him in a letter."

"I don't remember writing about him," said Mrs. Granger, who always penned the letters, although her dad signed them, too, and added comments. "You've never shown any interest in the business before, so I don't know why I'd have mentioned it."

"You must have, dear," said Hermione's dad. "How else would she know about that lawsuit?"

"I guess so," she conceded, but looked like she wasn't sure.

Hermione would later tell Harry that while she'd read books on dentistry, she'd never shown interest in her parents' actual practice before first year, but that over that Christmas break, her parents had mentioned that man had tried to sue them because a tooth her father had worked on was broken later that day when he got into a fight.

--HP--

Harry exited the car and gazed at the house before him while he realized he'd never been to Hermione's home before. It was slightly smaller than the Dursley house, but, at least to Harry, it looked much more inviting. The lawn was covered in snow, so Harry couldn't tell if they kept a garden or not. The light blue paneling on the house appeared to be only a year or two old.

“Well,” said Mr. Granger. “Here it is. Home, sweet home.” He opened the boot of the BMW and grabbed his daughter’s trunk. Harry then took his own. He’d elected to not keep it in his watch/trunk to avoid uncomfortable questions – at least at the train station. He knew he’d have to answer some questions when he and Hermione set up the cabinet in her room, but at least there wouldn’t be any students around listening. However, he didn’t have much in his regular school trunk, so it was pretty light. He had no problems carrying it into the house, nor following Hermione to the guest room with it.

The room was about the size of Dudley’s second bedroom, but had a nice bed in it. It had tan carpet and white walls, as well as an old dresser. There was also a large bookcase filled with books, which made Harry raise an eyebrow.

Hermione looked a bit embarrassed. “Well, you see, there’s just not enough space in my bedroom to keep all my books, so I use...”

“The whole house,” he completed with a smirk.

She grinned and stuck her tongue out at him. “Not quite.”

“Aren’t you gonna show me your room?” he asked. “I believe your mum told you to show me around the house.”

“Already trying to get in my bedroom?” she asked in mock-irritation.

“I just want to see your wall-to-wall bookshelves.”

“Ha-ha,” she replied with a smirk.

“Maybe the cabinet will have to go in here due to the lack of space.”

“That’s actually not a bad idea,” she commented.

“Oh?” he asked.

“Could you imagine my father’s reaction if he ever found out what that cabinet can do if it were in my bedroom?”



A look of fear came across Harry's face. "Good point."

"I think my parents should know what it is, anyway," she stated.

"What?" he asked, surprised.

"If not, then how will we be able to explain my disappearances or your sudden appearances when we use them?" She then smirked. "Besides, you can't use magic here, so how are you going to get the cabinet out of your trunk without dad's help?"

--HP--

A few minutes later, Hermione, with Harry behind her, opened the door to her bedroom. "Well, here it...oh my." She slammed the door as her face turned bright red.

Harry was amused with her embarrassed reaction. "What's wrong? Is it a mess?"

"Not hardly," she replied. "It's just I...forgot."

"Forgot what?"

She took a deep breath. "I, er, redecorated my room after second year."

He looked a bit confused. "So, you don't like how it's decorated now?" She nodded. "That's no problem," he said while grabbing the handle. "I'm sure the walls are covered with books any...." He clamped his mouth shut to stop him from laughing at his girlfriend. To say the room was girlish would be the understatement of the century. The walls were a bright shade of pink with purple hearts in a random pattern. Hermione's dresser was a light shade of purple, and her bed had sheets that matched the walls. The white carpet was alright, though.

But that wasn't what embarrassed Hermione. Hanging on one wall were framed report cards. Another had several rows of framed test

papers. Everything he saw was straight A's. Right below the test papers were pink bookcases next to each other, filling up that whole wall. All of those bookcases were full.

"I'm going to redecorate now," she declared from behind Harry, absentminded pulling out her wand.

"No," he said. "You'll get caught doing underage magic. We'll need to do it the muggle way."

"Fine. I'll ask my parents to pick up some paint and paintbrushes for us."

--HP--

"So, Harry," said Mrs. Granger, "Do you want to call your aunt and uncle and tell them you made it here alright?" It was the middle of dinner and she thought she was just making conversation. Harry dropped his fork and Hermione looked at her boyfriend with a concerned expression.

"No," he replied. "That won't be necessary."

"But you've just been for a long train ride and are with people they've never met. Surely they'll want to know you're fine. Also, they haven't heard your voice for months."

"They don't want to hear my voice," Harry said shakily. "And they don't want me to call them."

Mr. Granger's eyes narrowed slightly and Harry gulped. "They do know you're here, don't they? You haven't run away, have you?"

"No, sir," said Harry. "I haven't run away, but they don't know or care where I am."

The adult Grangers glanced at each other for a moment before he spoke. "We'll have to see about that."

"But, daddy," started Hermione, starting to panic. "You can't send him..."

"Honey," he interrupted. "I'm not sending him back, but I am calling his family." Harry tensed even more. "If his staying here is fine with them, then he'll stay. Otherwise..." He let the sentence hang before turning to the Boy-Who-Lived. "Harry, what's your phone number?"

--HP--

The young couple was in the living room waiting while Mr. and Mrs. Granger were making the phone call in another room.

"What do you think the Dursleys will do?" asked Hermione.

"Try to talk your parents into letting me spend the summer here, too," he replied neutrally.

"If you're so sure of that, then why are you still nervous?"

He sighed. He could never hide his mood from her. "It's just that they might want me brought to them just to make me miserable."

"I doubt they'd do that," she replied, "not after you removed Dudley's tail."

"I don't know. I'm just hoping that they realize that my not being with them is what they really want."

At that moment, the adults entered the room looking angry. "Harry, you can spend the holiday here," said Hermione's father. "And may I say I have never spoken with such an irritating man before."

"You were right about them not caring," said Hermione's mum sadly. She now looked sympathetic instead of angry as she put a hand on Harry's shoulder. "Your uncle got mad when we suggested he speak to you on the phone."

"I'm sorry that you had to speak with him, Mrs. Granger."

“Marissa, Harry, call me Marissa.”

“And you can call me Adam.”

“Thank you, sir, I mean, Adam.”

“So, what do you want to do tonight?” Adam Granger asked.

“Actually,” said Hermione, “There’s something we’d like your help with.”

“Oh,” Marissa asked, “What’s that?”

“You know how muggle magicians sometimes perform a magical vanishing cabinet trick?”

“Yes.”

Harry said, “Well, in our world, there really is such a thing as a vanishing cabinet.”

Both adults’ eyes bulged out. “Really? That’s fascinating.”

“They work in pairs,” added Hermione, “With one cabinet leading to the other.”

“Hm,” said Adam. “While that’s interesting, I still don’t see what the favor is.”

“I own a pair,” said Harry, “and...er...would like to keep one here.”

Both adults were silent for a few seconds. Marissa finally asked, “Where? Where do you have them?”

“Right here,” Harry said with a grin, pointing at his watch.

The two adults watched in amazement as he removed his watch, set it on the floor and expanded it. As he was leading them down the ladder, he said, “This is where I spent my last month with the Dursleys after locking my door.”

"It's an entire apartment," added Hermione. Her parents were speechless as they were given a brief tour.

"And these," said Harry proudly, "are the cabinets." He walked into one and out the other.

"Wow," said both adults.

"I wonder if they work for muggles?" commented Hermione.

"Why don't we find out?" said Adam before entering one. After about ten seconds, he exited the other. "I guess they do." He took a deep breath. "That leaves us with the question of whether I should allow one of these to be put in our home."

"Daddy, I'm sure you can see the advantages in it. We could visit you during the school year."

"I thought that castle was supposed to be secure so that no one could get in or out undetected."

Harry and Hermione exchanged grim expressions for a moment as they remembered how Malfoy had used these cabinets, once upon a never. "These do go past Hogwarts' wards," admitted Harry.

"But they're very rare," added Hermione.

"How did Harry get them?" asked Marissa.

"I bought them at a...wizard pawn shop. They were the only ones there and are considered antiques."

"They must have been expensive," commented Adam.

"They were," admitted Harry. "I inherited a decent amount of money from my parents that I didn't learn about until I got my Hogwarts letter. Aside from these and my special trunk, I've been pretty frugal."

"Where do you plan to keep the cabinet if we agree?" asked Marissa.

"In the spare room," answered Hermione.

"Let's get back up to the house," said Adam.

"Sure," said Harry. "By the way, when magic is performed inside the trunk, our Ministry can't detect it, so this could be a place to practice magic. I did last summer."

Marissa smiled. "Maybe later you two could give us a show of what you've learned."

They exited the trunk and Hermione's parents went into another room to discuss it.

"What if when they're older, they use that trunk to...you know?" asked Adam.

"They'd be able to do that at Hogwarts, anyway, and at least with one cabinet in here, we could burst in on them at any time."

"I suppose," he said, "it would be good for Hermione to be able to practice her magic during the holidays." He sighed, "Besides, I never liked the idea of not being able to see what I was paying for my daughter to learn until she turns seventeen." He paused. "I swear, the way she's been acting today, I'd think she already was that old. Have you noticed the change?"

Marissa nodded. "Yes, I guess going off into a whole new world by yourself will do that."

"I suppose," he grumbled. "But she even wants to redecorate her room."

"She just wants to show she's not a little girl anymore."

"Maybe," he grumbled. "So, we're agreed about putting a cabinet here, then?"

"Yes," she said, grinning. "I think it'll be fun to have it here."

“Yeah,” he agreed with a grin, “but if I catch him trying to sneak into Hermione’s room, wizard or not, I’ll...”

“They’re still young for that.”

“But they’ll grow up fast. I still can’t believe Hermione’s twelve. I remember driving her home from the hospital like it was yesterday. We’ll blink our eyes again and she’ll be eighteen.”

“Maybe I should talk to Hermione about boys before she goes back to school,” commented Marissa. “Anyway, let’s get that cabinet in Harry’s room.”

--HP--

At the same time that a vanishing cabinet was being moved from Harry’s trunk to the Grangers’ spare room, Albus Dumbledore was sitting in his office staring at a cloak he’d once borrowed from the late James Potter. This was the first time he’d looked at the cloak in a decade. He’d been truly surprised all those years ago to find this particular cloak in James’ possession, and he imagined that it was in Harry Potter’s great-grandfather’s possession at the time he and Grindelwald were seeking it out.

Albus knew by rights that the cloak belonged to Harry, but at the same time, he felt the boy would probably use it to run away from the Dursleys, and then he’d never be found if he were careful. The only magical objects Dumbledore knew of that would allow someone to see through this cloak were his glasses and Alastor’s wonderful eye. He had personally charmed both of those devices with his own wand that he’d won from Grindelwald, all those years ago. The Ministry aurors used a cheap imitation of Dumbledore’s glasses that could see through most invisibility cloaks – but not this one.

Also, the headmaster simply didn’t trust Harry. He’d already caused enough damage by sending all those memories to Rita Skeeter. Who knows what he’d do at Hogwarts if he could become invisible? He’d already shown that if he can’t get his way, he’ll have revenge, even if he had to use his celebrity status to do so, bashing the reputations of

both himself and Severus in the process. The boy had no respect for authority. He'd probably use the cloak to discredit other teachers he doesn't like or to steal exam answer keys.

He picked up the folded cloak and placed it back in its drawer, placing appropriate security charms. He'd return it when the boy turned seventeen. It was already in his will that Harry should receive that cloak if he (Albus) died before then. What Harry didn't know wouldn't hurt him, and Dumbledore was positive that Remus didn't know he had the cloak. The werewolf most likely assumed it was destroyed when Voldemort killed James and Lily.

--HP--

Just before he went to bed, Harry was headed to the bathroom with his toothbrush and toothpaste. Even though he technically could brush his teeth in his trunk, he figured that it would be impolite to do so. He did that at the Dursleys because he wanted no part of them but didn't want to give that impression to the Grangers.

As he approached the lavatory, the door swung open, revealing Hermione's father. "Hi, Harry. I hope I didn't keep you waiting."

"No," he answered. "I was just on my way to brush my teeth." He held up his toothbrush as he spoke.

Dr. Granger's eyes narrowed at the dental instrument that had obviously seen better days. "That toothbrush needs to be replaced. How long have you had it?"

"Er," he said, suddenly feeling a bit embarrassed. "As long as I can remember."

"Don't you get a new one at your dentist's office?"

Now Harry's ears turned pink. He looked down at the floor as his feet started to shuffle. "You see, I haven't...I've never..."

It didn't take his doctorate to figure out what Harry was trying to say, especially after his earlier phone conversation with Vernon Dursley.



"The Dursleys never took you to a dentist." It was a statement, not a question, but Harry nodded ashamedly.

"We'll fix that tomorrow. I can fit you in at ten for the works – x-rays and cleaning. Then, if I find any cavities I can take care of them before you go back to school."

Although Harry contemplated the idea of being at the mercy of his girlfriend's father in a dentist chair (despite the fact Adam didn't know he was Hermione's boyfriend), he shrugged his shoulders, deciding that he could probably benefit from dental services. "Sure. I can get the money at Gringotts if..."

"No. This one's on the house," said Marissa from behind Harry. She'd obviously been listening to the conversation.

"You don't have to," he started to object.

"We insist," said Adam. "But for tonight, I do believe we may have a new toothbrush lying around somewhere." He walked back into the bathroom and opened the cabinet, revealing a stack of new toothbrushes. "I don't suppose you've ever flossed, either?"

"Flossed?" Harry didn't even know what that meant.

Adam sighed. "I suppose you can wait one more night for that. I'll make sure to teach you how to floss tomorrow at your appointment."

Harry took the new toothbrush and did what he'd intended, and then went to bed. That's when the nervousness set in. He knew Dudley always complained about the dentist, but realized that Dudley wasn't your average kid, so his complaints might not be valid. He started whispering to himself.

"I've faced Death Eaters. I've faced Voldemort. I've even injected myself with poison to come back in time. I can face a dentist."

--HP--

The next morning found a very tired, yet tense, Harry sitting next to Hermione in a waiting room.

“Calm down, Harry. Dad’s not going to hurt you.”

“Not if I sneak out,” he replied with a smirk.

“Very funny,” she said before he stuck his tongue out at her.

It was about fifteen minutes later that Harry was led into the exam room by the hygienist.

“Well, young man, I understand that this is your first dental cleaning.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Harry said as he climbed into the odd chair.

The next forty-five minutes were very unpleasant. In between taking a fluoride treatment that was not really the flavor he’d requested – just a poor imitation – and having his teeth scraped by that pick, he discovered that his gums were very ticklish. Yet, at the same time, his gums, as well as the rest of his mouth, were in pain, especially as his teeth were being flossed. He couldn’t imagine how Dr. Granger expected him to start doing that to himself every day.

After the cleaning, his mouth was x-rayed from every imaginable angle. While he waited for the results, he wondered which was worse – a dental appointment or Voldemort’s cruciatus curse. He had just concluded that it depended on how long one was held under the spell when the door opened again.

“So, Harry,” said Adam Granger, “That wasn’t so bad, was it?” The boy remained silent. “I suppose it wasn’t very pleasant. There’s a reason for that. I’m afraid your teeth are in bad shape.”

“How bad?” Harry asked.

“Well, you have six cavities that I’ll fill before you go back to school.”

“Joy,” said Harry sarcastically.

"You've also got gingivitis."

"That's some kind of problem with my gums, right?"

"Yes. You also have several loose teeth, as well as a few missing ones." His expression turned to one of concern. "Did the Dursleys do that to you? Did they hit you in the mouth?"

"Dudley did," admitted Harry as he looked down. "Whenever I couldn't dodge."

"And the Dursleys did nothing about it?"

"I was punished for hurting Dudley's hand with my teeth the day I lost one of them."

Mr. Granger looked very upset. He took two deep breaths before speaking again. "What I'd usually recommend is braces, but they'll need adjustments, where you have to come back here. The problem is your school..."

"Can't I just use the cabinet to sneak into your house and go to this office from there?" Harry asked.

The dentist looked like he could hit himself. "Of course! We can make Saturday appointments." More quietly he mumbled, "I could do the same with Hermione." Looking back at his patient, he said, "Marissa is the orthodontist. She'll have to handle the braces. The problem is who will pay for them." He sighed. "As much as we'd like to pay for everything, braces are more expensive than..."

"I've got money at Gringotts," said Harry. "It shouldn't be a problem."

They spent the next few minutes discussing the price. Harry commented that it should just cover a trip to Flourish and Blotts for Hermione, but Adam retorted that they didn't charge that much for braces.

--HP--

Hermione wasn't entirely thrilled when she found out that she could now get braces, but Harry reminded her that they'd be able to disillusion them anyway so nobody would see them. They decided not to mention the Time-Turners to her parents, just assuring them that they wouldn't be missed for a few hours on a Saturday. The truth is that they wouldn't be missing from Hogwarts at all when they would use the cabinets.

After leaving the office (which was only a mile from the Grangers' house) on foot, the kids stopped by a nearby store to get paint and supplies for redecorating Hermione's room. Her parents had given her some money for that. The couple had their hands full as they walked out of the store and around it, until they were out of sight. Harry then took off his watch, and they loaded their supplies into it. Walking a mile was much easier without being loaded down with cans of paint.

Harry and Hermione spent the next few days wearing old clothes as they painted her room. The walls were painted light blue, and her parents got her new sheets to match. All her report cards and tests were put into a box and stored in the attic. The bookcases were painted a light shade of brown. Hermione embarrassed Harry by hanging a picture of him on her wall, along with a picture of her parents.

However, on Christmas Eve, Harry dressed in a suit he'd bought along with his other clothes the previous summer. He'd apparently grown a bit since then, but was able to magically adjust its size while inside his trunk, safe from the Ministry's monitoring of magic. The adult Grangers had been very impressed the day before by a demonstration of some first-year spells inside that trunk.

The reason Harry, as well as the Grangers, was dressed up was because they were going to church. The Boy-Who-Lived personally had never been inside a place of worship before in his life, although the Dursleys attended on Christmas Eve as well as Easter every year. When he was little, he'd asked why he couldn't go and was told that the roof would cave in if a freak like him walked inside, before being locked in his cupboard.

Now, he understood what Aunt Petunia had meant. She had mistaken muggles who try to be witches and wizards through rituals considered evil by the church with people like himself who are simply born with magic in their blood. As he understood it, although he was no expert by any means, what those muggles would do could easily be considered worship of something besides the Christian God, and some of them even did harmful things to others.

His magic, on the other hand, had absolutely nothing to do with faith, worship or religion. It was just a natural talent, no different from being good at spelling, except that it was a lot rarer and required a special school to learn about. He also knew that no ritual, potion or spell could make a muggle magical, just as no ritual, potion or spell could take someone's magic from them. Otherwise the purebloods would've been taking magic from muggle-borns and giving it to squibs for the past thousand years.

Overall, he found his first church experience fairly interesting, although he didn't completely understand some of what was being talked about. He did understand the concepts of loving your neighbor as yourself and doing unto others what you want them to do unto you, which the preacher said was a large part of true Christianity. With that in mind, Harry immediately decided something he'd long suspected but didn't know enough to prove – the Dursleys weren't really Christians. He, himself, didn't know what he believed in besides the concept of right and wrong. The other part of Christianity the preacher had talked about was something Harry didn't understand – a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

--HP--

The next day, Harry celebrated his first Christmas away from the Dursleys for the second time. It began with a loud knock on his door.

"Harry, wake up!" Hermione's voice came through the door. "Happy Christmas!"

Shaking himself awake, he called out, "Happy Christmas, Hermione. Give me a minute."

“Just one minute, and you’d better be out by then.”

After wiping the sleep out of his eyes, putting on his glasses and yawning, he got himself out of bed and pulled a t-shirt on (he was already wearing a pair of jogging pants) and opened the door. “Good morning, love,” he whispered to his secret girlfriend before following her to the living room, where four stacks of presents were under the tree.

“Happy Christmas, Harry!” said both Adam and Marissa Granger.

He smiled at them both and replied, “Happy Christmas.”

“Let’s get these presents open so we can eat breakfast,” said Hermione’s dad. “Sweetheart,” he continued, indicating his daughter, “Why don’t you pass out the gifts?”

“Alright.”

She began passing the gifts out to the other three before opening anything of her own, until her mum said, “Honey, why don’t you open that package?” She pointed at a rather large package, which turned out to be an encyclopedia set. Hermione’s face lit up with joy upon seeing that.

“We figured that Harry wouldn’t mind storing that in his portable apartment,” commented her father while Harry nodded his head, obviously delighted in seeing his girlfriend so happy. “We would’ve gotten them for you during the summer but knew they wouldn’t fit in your school trunk, but now...” He trailed off, not wasting his breath explaining how much room she had access to because of Harry. She quickly hugged both her parents.

Although Harry had insisted that his dental checkup was enough of a gift, the Grangers given him a year’s subscription to ‘The Amazing Spider-Man’ comic, along with the current issue. He happily began flipping through it, saying, “Dudley would always tear his comics up when he got done with them so I couldn’t even think of borrowing them.”

Harry gave Hermione a collection of different colored inks, along with some fancy new quills, while Hermione got him a book on prank-spells. They'd agreed to not give each other any romantic gifts to avoid suspicion until they started officially dating in third year.

It was about that time that there was a loud POP in the living room, and a crying female house elf appeared holding two small wrapped packages.

"Master Harry is giving Winky a Christmas present!" she exclaimed while sobbing. "Winky is knowing Harry Potter is being a great wizard, but never has anyone been giving Winky a present!"

"Happy Christmas, Winky," replied Harry.

The crying elf then turned to Hermione. "And Harry Potter's Grangy is also giving Winky a present. She is being a great witch."

"It, it was nothing," said Hermione. "Happy Christmas."

"Aren't you going to open them," asked Harry while the adult Grangers watched in silence.

"Oh, Yes, Winky is being opening them!" She then tore into the package from Harry like a toddler and gasped when she saw what it was. She began another round of bawling as she held the gold necklace in her hands. "This is being too beautiful for Winky."

"It suits you," said Harry. "Why don't you put it on?"

"Let me help you," said Hermione when she noticed the elf's trembling hands. Once it was on, she told Winky it looked very pretty on her. When she looked like she was about to start crying, Hermione said, "Now, open mine."

When that package was torn open, it revealed a magical sewing kit, along with an instruction manual and supplies. Hermione said, "Since we can't give you clothes, I thought I'd give you the means to make your own."

Winky began bawling yet again. "Winky is a bad elf! Winky isn't getting presents for Harry Potter and his Grangy!"

"That's alright, Winky," assured Harry. "You didn't know we were giving you presents."

"You didn't expect to celebrate Christmas with us, so you didn't think you'd need presents," added Hermione.

"You're not a bad elf. You're a good one," said Harry, "and we hope you have a very happy Christmas."

Winky cried more, and after thanking both of them yet again, she popped away with her gifts.

"That was unusual," said Hermione's father, once the elf was gone.

"Could you tell us what that was?" added her mother. Harry and Hermione briefly explained house-elves and said that Harry had recently hired Winky. After that, they resumed opening their presents.

Harry noted regretfully that he did not receive a Weasley sweater for Christmas, although this year he got something from the Grangers instead. Both he and Hermione exchanged a look when he got through all his presents and did not receive his father's invisibility cloak.

--HP--

Please review. Thank you to those who have.



## Chapter Twelve – Finishing up the Holidays

The rest of Christmas Day passed happily, with Winky popping up later with gifts – a dozen huge platters stacked with Christmas cookies for Harry and 6 large cakes for Hermione. All the cakes were decorated with pictures of Christmas scenes inside different houses. A small Santa would set gifts under the tree in one house, step into the fireplace while throwing powder into it, the flames would turn green and he'd appear in the fireplace of another and start spreading out more gifts. Each of the houses looked different and had a different toddler sleeping on the couch that would occasionally be woken up.

It was the next day that Hermione had one of the most awkward conversations of her life.

--HP--

"Hermione," said Marissa Granger.

"Yes, mum."

"Since your father is out picking up dinner with Harry, I thought it might be a good time for us to have a little chat."

"Oh," asked Hermione, "what about?"

Marissa sighed. "You seem to have changed quite a bit since you went to Hogwarts."

The twelve/nineteen-year-old girl got nervous. "Really?" she said, trying to look nonchalant. "In what ways?"

"For one thing," the woman said, looking into her daughter's eyes, "You seem happier."

"I am," she replied. "I really like it there a lot more than any other school I've been to." She sighed and honestly admitted, "I've finally got friends."

“I’m happy for you.” The older woman seemed to hesitate for a few seconds. “Which brings me to Harry. You’ve called him your best friend.”

“Oh, absolutely. You saw that we became friends before we even got on the platform, and he’s helped me make other friends. Without him, I don’t think I’d have any other friends, so I wouldn’t enjoy my time at Hogwarts at all.”

“Is he just your best friend?”

Hermione coughed at this question as her cheeks involuntarily colored. ‘Oh, no,’ she thought. ‘I’m about to get the talk.’ In the previous timeline, she’d avoided this until just before her third year. She decided to misunderstand. “No, he’s good friends with other people as well. I think Neville Longbottom would also consider Harry to be his best friend, too.”

With a slight grin on her face, Marissa gently countered, “That’s not what I mean, and you know it.” Hermione swallowed. “If I must spell it out, I’m asking if you fancy him.”

The young woman in a girl’s body couldn’t stand how this younger body was responding to this inquisition. Whereas before traveling through time, her eighteen-year-old body had stopped blushing at these kinds of questions, this twelve-year-old one couldn’t help it. She didn’t say anything as she desperately tried to keep her expression under control.

“It’s nothing to be embarrassed about,” assured her mother. “He’s a nice boy and has been good to you. He’s also cute, don’t you think?”

Hermione absolutely hated the stupid grin that forced its way onto her face with that question. Deciding she had to say something, Hermione decided on being a bit honest. “Er, yeah, a bit, I suppose.” It was partially honest. The truth would’ve been a much stronger statement.

Marissa giggled just a bit. “And those eyes…”

“Um-hm,” Hermione replied, not trusting herself to say anything, such as describing how looking into those emerald eyes makes her want to do things that no twelve-year-old should think about, at least in her opinion.

Taking a deep breath, her mum continued. “I was going to wait a few years for this, but since you’re already close friends with such a fine young man, I think we should have this discussion now. You see, you’re just on the threshold of your feelings about boys, er, expanding to the point where you’ll want to...do things with them.”

Hermione suppressed a laugh as she saw how her mother was now getting embarrassed. “Like what?” she asked, feigning ignorance.

“Er, well, kissing for one.”

“Kissing a boy?” Hermione repeated, pretending to be revolted. “You think I want to kiss Harry?” The girl/woman decided to have fun with this conversation, acting like an innocent little girl. Yet, she hadn’t actually said she didn’t want to kiss Harry.

“Maybe not now,” her mother assured her, seeming a bit happier, “but soon.”

“I don’t know,” replied Hermione.

Pressing on, the woman added, “I wanted to talk to you about that small apartment Harry carries around on his wrist.”

“His trunk?”

“Yes. You see, your father and I realized that it’s a perfect, private place to...kiss, and we wanted to make sure that you remember that with the vanishing cabinet we can walk in on you anytime.”

“That’s NOT why Harry got that trunk!” said Hermione defensively.

“We know that, dear, but in a few years, Harry might start thinking about that aspect of it and want to...er.”

“Take advantage of me?” asked Hermione, who was now getting upset. “Harry would never try to hurt me!”

“He might not see it that way. He...”

“He will not try to justify forcing someone to...”

“I’m sorry, honey. You’re probably right. Harry seems like a very nice young man. But there may be others who will try to do that. Hopefully, they don’t all have their own private apartment.”

“As far as I know, Harry’s the only one who needs one.” Hermione was subtly trying to get him some sympathy.

The woman sighed. “Just remember that you want your first kiss to be special – not something you give up because some boy makes you feel obligated to or because he can’t keep his hands off you.”

‘First kiss,’ Hermione thought. ‘If only you knew...’ “I’ll remember.”

“And while we’re on the subject, although you’re far too young to consider it, I thought we could talk a bit about...”

--HP--

Although Adam Granger had considered talking to Harry about girls, figuring the Dursleys never would, he was afraid he’d only give the boy ideas. He did manage to mention that the vanishing cabinet in the house meant that he and his wife could step into that apartment any time. He figured that would at least discourage Harry from using the special trunk to his advantage. He drove slowly as they picked up dinner so that his wife and daughter would have all the time they needed to talk, which luckily, they did.

Dinner was a very quiet affair, with Hermione acting embarrassed, and afterward Harry asked if he could talk to her. They walked to her newly-redecorated room and closed the door.

“I hope mum doesn’t think I’m studying what we talked about,” she said once the door closed.

"What did you talk about?" he asked, now curious.

"Boys, and you in general. A conversation we didn't originally have for a few more years."

"Oh," he said with a smirk. "Did you learn anything new that we could try out?"

"Shut up," she said, grinning as she lightly smacked his arm. "It was interesting pretending that I've never even kissed before." Harry silently grinned. "That I don't even want to...that I find it gross."

He chuckled.

"It's not funny. I have to be her perfect, innocent twelve-year-old little girl when I'm..."

"I'm sorry," Harry replied sincerely. "I know you don't like lying to your parents."

"I should be happy they're here, but I'm worried about..." She trailed off as he wrapped her in a hug. She cried on his shoulder for a few minutes before stopping. "You'd better go before my parents do get worried."

"Alright," he replied before giving her a quick kiss. "I can't wait until we're old enough to date openly," he said softly before opening the door and leaving.

"Me, neither," Hermione whispered.

--HP--

It was a few days later that the young couple realized something was very, very wrong. They were alone in the house while her parents were working.

"Harry," Hermione said. "How long has it been since the last time you wrote to Kingsley?"

Harry sighed. "About a week, without any response. I'm worried."

"You would think that Sirius would be free now with the Crouch family out of the way."

"I know!" he replied, clearly frustrated. "I wonder if there's someone else high up in the Ministry that doesn't want to free Sirius."

"It's a possibility," she replied, "but who?"

"I don't know. I think someone was pressuring Kingsley and he didn't like it, but in his last letter he did tell us not to involve him in anything illegal."

"Maybe he was trying to say that the only way we'll be able to free Sirius is illegal."

"Break him out of Azkaban?" Harry questioned before shrugging his shoulders. "Do you know where it is?" She nodded. He stood up from his chair. "Then let's go."

"Harry! We can't just go there and break someone out..."

"But..."

"We've got to plan it out so we don't end up in the cell next to him."

"Oh," conceded Harry. "I suppose."

"Suppose?"

"Fine. Hermione, you're right. You've always been right, and you always will be right."

"That's better," she said with a smirk.

--HP--

The rest of the holidays went by quickly, with Harry getting his cavities filled, and both Harry and Hermione getting braces – all thoroughly unpleasant experiences, along with New Year's Eve, where Harry kissed Hermione's cheek at the stroke of midnight while her parents were properly kissing. Shortly thereafter, the kids were told to go to their bedrooms. Both kids' braces were disillusioned inside Harry's trunk so that no one could tell they had braces without actually touching their teeth. They promised the Grangers they'd make them visible for every adjustment. Plans were made for liberating Harry's cloak from Dumbledore's office (assuming it was there) and the beginnings of the Azkaban break-out plan were made, although much work would be required before they would attempt it. Before they knew it, the couple was back at Platform Nine-and-Three-Quarters.

--HP--

"Now, be careful, both of you, and don't do anything that could get you into trouble," said Marissa Granger to both Harry and Hermione. She turned to Harry while her husband hugged Hermione. "I'm glad to have gotten to know you better. I hope you can visit us this summer." She engulfed him in a tight hug. "If you ever want to talk to an adult who's not your teacher, I want you to write me, Harry." She then whispered, "Or even visit."

"Thanks, Marissa," Harry replied, his face showing that he was touched by what she'd said. Molly Weasley had never actually made that offer in the original timeline, although Harry figured that he could've talked to her about things if he'd asked.

Turning to her daughter and hugging her, she said, "I love you, Hermione."

Adam shook Harry's hand, and together, they carried the trunks onto the train. Harry had explained that he wanted to have a visible trunk so that he didn't call more attention to himself. "Keep an eye on my daughter," Adam said before leaving the train. "Make sure she doesn't study so much she doesn't enjoy life."

"I will, sir."

A few minutes later, Hermione and he had settled down in their compartment and were joined by Neville. "Hi, guys. How was your Christmas?"

"Great," said Harry honestly. "It was the best one I ever had." With a grin he added, "Except that her dad attacked me with a drill."

Hermione's expression turned to outrage as her hands went on her hips.

"What's a drill?" asked Neville.

"A muggle device used to put holes in things like wood," answered Harry. "He used it in my mouth."

"What?" asked Neville, looking scared.

"Harry James Potter!" said Hermione in a no-nonsense tone of voice. "You will properly explain what my father did. I will not have Neville believing him to be some kind of maniac!"

"Fine," Harry sighed. "He was fixing some of my teeth. I don't recall if Hermione told you both her parents are dentists, the muggle equivalent of teeth-healers I suppose."

"Oh," said Neville, looking a bit relieved.

"How was your Christmas, Neville?"

"Good. Gran gave me..."

Finding out what Neville's grandmother gave him would have to wait until later, because at that moment, they were interrupted by the three clowns of Slytherin.

"Well, well, if it isn't Scarhead, the Mudblood and the Squib." Crabbe and Goyle laughed.



“Shove off, Malfoy!” said Harry, getting his wand out, “Unless you want to be humiliated again.” He glanced at Hermione and slightly moved his eyes toward the three Slytherins. She winked at him.

“Big talk, Scarhead.”

Pointing his wand in Draco’s general direction, Harry said, “I don’t care which Unforgivables your daddy taught you over break, I can still humiliate you just as badly as I did when...”

At that moment, Draco fell on his knees and proceeded to violently vomit on the floor. While he was shaking and sweating, Harry performed a banishing charm to force him to, “Get your filth out of here, you slimy pukeblood!” He pointed his wand at Crabbe while Hermione aimed at Goyle. “You two, get out of here before we make you lick Malfoy’s mess up!” The two ran out of there, stepping in the filth on their way out. Harry quickly vanished it, cleansed the air and closed the door. He turned his attention to Hermione. “Nice hex.”

“Thanks,” she said, “It should last about an hour.”

“I’m surprised you didn’t do the same thing as last ride,” he commented.

“I forgot.”

“By the way, Nev,” said Harry, changing the subject. “We got you a little something for Christmas.” He pulled a wrapped package out of his pocket while Hermione did the same.

Neville’s ears turned pink as he said, “You didn’t have to...”

“We wanted to,” interrupted Hermione as she handed him hers. When Neville opened her gift, it turned out to be a small guide to magical plants, while Harry gave him some chocolate frogs.

“Thanks, guys. I, er, got something for you, too. I forgot to give it to you before we left for Christmas.” He opened his trunk and rummaged through it, eventually pulling out two identical sphere-shaped packages that turned out to be Remembralls. The rest of the

train ride went without incident, and before long, they were back at Hogwarts.

--HP--

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

## Chapter Thirteen – Breaking and Entering

Classes were quite easy for Harry and Hermione, who did continue to help Neville a lot. However, their main focus was two different projects, one of which would be much easier than the other, yet both had one thing in common – they involved breaking and entering. The first and simplest of these missions occurred during dinner a few days into the new term. Harry and Hermione had taken their time eating their meal and being seen by everyone sitting near them, as well as most of the staff, including Dumbledore. About fifteen minutes into the dinner, the headmaster got up and left the room, returning after ten minutes and taking a piece of cake. Once Harry and Hermione left the Great Hall, they used their Time-Turner.

Harry enlarged his broomstick after removing it from his pocket and mounted it, allowing Hermione to get on behind him, hugging herself tightly to him.

“This is cozy,” Harry commented with a grin.

“I suppose so,” she said. Being an owl-Animagus helped her overcome most of her fear of heights, but she still didn’t really like riding brooms. However, she knew that Harry loved it and she did enjoy hugging him like that, so she didn’t talk about her discomfort. In fact, hugging Harry tightly was the reason she’d decided to join him rather than transform and fly up there herself. “I’ll disillusion you and then you do the same to me.” She then touched his head with her wand and watched her boyfriend disappear. A few moments later, she felt his wand lightly tap her head, followed by the cold sensation associated with that spell.

“I’m taking off now,” Harry said, in hopes of not frightening Hermione. He did know she didn’t enjoy flying on brooms. About half-way up to their destination, he commented, “I wonder if I can control a broom in my form.”

“I doubt it,” she replied, with a bit of laughter in her voice.

“I should try sometime.”

“Not with me on the broom, you won’t. I’ll need to be ready to catch you when you fall.”

“It’s just not fair that your form can fly but mine can’t,” he complained.

“Life isn’t fair,” she replied. “Anyway, we’re here.”

Harry let go of the broom with his right and got his special wand out. Wordlessly, he vanished the glass of Dumbledore’s large window and flew inside. Harry noticed Fawkes watching them intently, but not making a sound. Once they’d dismounted the broom, Harry whispered, “Accio, my dad’s Invisibility cloak.” He didn’t think it would be that easy, but he thought they might learn something from the spell, and he was right.

After a second, they heard a sound similar to a pillow hitting a wall, coming from inside a drawer in the Headmaster’s desk. “There,” whispered Hermione. Harry reached out to open it, but was stopped by his girlfriend slapping his hand. “Wait. I need to check it for hexes.” She pointed her wand at the appropriate place and shot a few spells at the drawer, causing it to turn red. “You see. You’d have gotten a mild shock and your hand would’ve turned blue for days. You’d have gotten us caught.”

“I’m sorry,” he said, properly chastised.

“Let’s see,” she mumbled more to herself than Harry as she went through a list of counter-jinxes in her mind. “I’ve got it,” she said, finally causing the drawer to turn blue. She touched it with no problems and opened the drawer, revealing the cloak. At that moment, they heard something they’d hoped to avoid.

“Tootsie Rolls,” said the voice of Albus Dumbledore.

“He’s not in this room,” Harry commented.

“He must have a listening charm at the entrance,” said Hermione as she grabbed the cloak and closed the drawer. “That’s how he knows who’s at his door.”

While she was replacing the spells on the drawer (with her special wand so that the signature couldn't be traced), they heard footsteps echoing up the stairs. "The hallway, too," commented Harry as he mounted his broom. "Get on."

Hermione obeyed and they quickly flew out the window, with her performing a, "Reparo," charm on it once they were through.

"He can see through invisibility cloaks," said Harry, "so he probably could see through the disillusionment charm as well." While he was talking, he shot straight up until he was above the castle, and then flew over it toward the other side. Only when they were above the castle did they slow down to make themselves invisible. They managed to get where they belonged before the full hour was up, so they weren't missed.

--HP--

Professor Dumbledore had been spearing a piece of steak with his fork when he felt a security ward go off in his office. He had them in place whenever he was out of the office because he had many valuable objects there, as well as books with information that could be dangerous in the wrong hands. He didn't make them sound a loud alarm for a few reasons. One is that it could cause a panic, and the other is to lure the culprit into a false sense of security. He ate the food on his fork and stood up. "Excuse me, but nature is calling," he said before walking out of the Great Hall. He made his way to his office as quickly as possible, giving the gargoyle his password, "Tootsie Rolls," before walking up the stairs.

He knew that the intruder could hear him, but there was no way for him or her to escape that quickly. The floo only worked for him, and he was the only one who could make a portkey that went through Hogwarts' wards. When he opened the door, everything looked untouched. He quickly used his wand to try to detect any hexes in the area, as well as to see if any of his own security charms had been removed. The only thing he could find was that the ward for detecting intruders had been set off. Everything else was exactly as it had been. He turned to his phoenix, wishing he could communicate telepathically with it, as many people seemed to believe he could.

"Fawkes, did you see the intruder who was just here?" The bird nodded its head in response.

"Did the intruder steal anything?" The phoenix shook its head in the negative.

"Will you help me find the intruder?" The phoenix shook its head again.

"Very well," sighed Dumbledore, knowing that it was absolutely useless arguing with that bird. Obviously, Fawkes was of the opinion that whoever was in the office did nothing wrong. Albus sighed once more and left, wondering how they exited so quickly. For all he knew, Fawkes had personally flamed them out and returned.

--HP--

"Now we each have our own Invisibility cloak," said Hermione, who was claiming the Crouch cloak for herself, which Harry had no objections to. They were in the Room of Requirement later that night discussing their success.

"I just still can't believe he'd keep mine from me just because I've gotten him upset at me. That's theft." Hermione giggled. "It's not funny."

"I was just remembering how irresponsible I thought he was being the first time around when he gave you the cloak. I mean, you used it to sneak around after curfew the very first night you had it."

He chuckled a bit at the memory. "I suppose." He shrugged his shoulders. "To give him the benefit of the doubt, which I don't know if he deserves or not, he might have intended to give it to me later, after he thought he could trust me to be a good little boy."

"Exactly," Hermione agreed.

"The trouble is that he had no right to make that decision. He can't choose whether or not I should inherit my parents' stuff. He also had no right to choose where I was placed after my parents died."

"Harry," his companion said with concern.

He sighed. "I know. There's no point in worrying about the past. I just wish he'd stop acting like he's God – that he alone is able to decide right from wrong, interfering with anybody else's rights as he goes."

"I know," said Hermione.

"So, have you come up with a plan to break Sirius out of Azkaban yet?"

Shaking her head, she replied, "No, but I did decide on one thing. We need the plans to Azkaban, and there's only one place we'll be able to find them."

He grinned at her. "Let me guess. We're going to break into the Ministry?"

"Exactly, Harry. You've already broken in there once, so how hard can it be?"

"Maybe we can frame someone else for being drunk and get them in trouble."

With a grin on her face, Hermione replied, "No, as funny as it was to see Umbridge's picture like that in the Prophet, we shouldn't do things like that. You technically shouldn't have done that to her either, but I understand how much temptation that was, and can't say I wouldn't have done something similar to that wicked...witch."

Taking a deep breath to stop himself from laughing, he said, "The Ministry is a lot less secure now than it was when Voldemort was in charge. I just had to..."

--HP--

A few nights later, while one set of Harry and Hermione were in their beds at Hogwarts, another set, with the aid of a Time-Turner, had just arrived at the Ministry of Magic. They'd left the school through the One-Eyed Witch secret passage, and once they were clear of Hogwarts' wards, they disillusioned themselves and apparated directly to the lobby. They brought their cloaks with them, because cloaks seemed to work better than the spell, but the spell offered more freedom of movement. Just as before, Harry confunded the guard. However, this time they didn't ride the lift all the way to Level Nine – the Department of Mysteries.

"Level Two, Department of Magical Law Enforcement," announced the lift just before it opened.

Both the intruders were invisible, but that didn't stop the auror on duty from pointing his wand at the door and asking, "Who's there?" When there was no response except for sounds indicating someone leaving the lift, he shouted, "Stop, or I'll fire."

"Stupefy!" whispered Harry, quickly taking down their opponent.

"Harry," hissed Hermione. "You shouldn't have..."

"Ow!" said the disillusioned Harry as a yellow beam of light from the side hit him.

Hermione heard him fall and said, "Protego!" just in time to block the same spell from hitting her.

"Surrender, in the name of the Ministry!" shouted a woman's voice, giving Hermione a target. This female auror was invisible as well.

"Stupefy!" she thought, and from the crash a moment later, Hermione knew the spell had made contact. She peered all around her and listened for any sound.

After about thirty seconds, she heard a familiar voice groan. "What was that?" Harry quietly asked as Hermione followed the voice to her companion's side.



"Are you alright?" she demanded.

"My shoulder's sore and I've got a headache. I think I banged my head after that spell hit me."

"You may have a concussion," she replied.

"Maybe, but I can't exactly lie down here, can I?"

"I suppose not. Let me help you up. Can you see the distortion my hand is making?" She wiggled her fingers to help him.

"Yes," he replied a few seconds later before taking her hand.

Once they were both standing up, Hermione said, "I'll modify their memories on the way out. For now, we need to hurry."

They made their way as quickly as possible and got to Director Amelia Bones' office without any troubles. They'd had to confound a few more aurors who weren't paying attention, but that was it. Hermione then started scanning the door for any wards while Harry stood guard. After five long minutes, she finally opened the door, commenting, "Madam Bones had a lot of wards on her office."

"I guess she didn't want it broken into," replied Harry with a grin. Right after they walked in, the door closed itself. "I just hope the plans are in this room."

"There'd be no point in summoning them, though," said Hermione. "They'd be charmed against that. We'll have to carefully look through the office. Let's get started."

They did just that, scanning every drawer and cabinet for hexes before opening them, until finally after nearly two hours, Harry said, "I think I found it." He was looking at a paper he'd pulled out of a file cabinet.

Hermione walked over and examined it for a few seconds. "Yes. That's it. It's got a map and a listing of every prisoner." She carefully looked at every page before replacing the documents. "That should

be enough. Let's get this office looking exactly like it did before we arrived."

Once that was done, Harry put the Time-Turner around both their necks, wincing when Hermione touched his shoulder. "Are you alright?" she asked, concerned.

"That's just where I was hit by that spell. Once we're back, maybe you should look at it."

"I will. I'm glad you're allowing that voluntarily."

"I think it was just Infligo, but I don't know that for sure," he replied. "Anyway, are you ready to go back in time?"

"Sure." He turned the hourglass twice, and they waited silently for about five minutes until the door opened. They waited until they heard Harry's voice say, "I guess she didn't want it broken into." They quickly slid out the door and shut it behind them.

On the way out, they obliviated the aurors they'd stunned and revived them, making them believe nothing had happened. They managed to sneak out of the Ministry and back to Hogwarts with no further problems. They went to the Room of Requirement, where Harry took off his shirt for Hermione to examine his shoulder.

"You are starting to develop muscle," said Hermione as she ran scans on his bruised shoulder. "In a few more years, I won't be able to keep my hands off of you."

"In a few years?" he questioned, acting like he was insulted.

"Well, you are only eleven. I mean, there's not much on me right now to...er..."

"You're still beautiful," he interrupted.

She blushed for a moment before saying, "According to the scans, you're simply bruised. It looks like the spell simulated a good punch."

"I didn't think it was good," he complained.

"Aww. Do you want me to kiss it and make it all better?"

"Yes," he said with a smirk.

"Too bad." She then pointed her wand at the shoulder, healing it instantly.

"Can I still get a kiss?"

--HP--

The next day, Harry and Hermione were back in the Room of Requirement, looking over Azkaban's layout displayed above several thought spheres. Hermione was taking notes on all of them in a muggle notebook. She sighed aloud, getting Harry's attention as he was trying to commit the cell locations to memory. "Do you see all the security around the island? No wonder it took several months before Voldemort broke his people out."

"He was also trying to steal the prophecy at the same time," countered Harry, "so he was distracted."

She took a deep breath. "That may make a bit of a difference, but this is still going to take over a month to plan."

--HP--

The weeks passed slowly as Hermione (with Harry's help when she wasn't shooing him away in annoyance) planned the break-in to Azkaban. They weren't using the Time-Turner for that, figuring that since they had most of their assignments for the year done in advance (thanks to the Pensieve they'd remembered all the assignments from first year from all the classes except D.A.D.A. and Potions, who had different teachers this time around) so they worked on that when they would've worked on their classes. Hermione's Azkaban notes were charmed to look like Transfiguration notes to anyone who happened to glance at them.

They had, however, already had to use the Time-Turner to get their braces adjusted, and Hermione had to admit she enjoyed seeing her parents so soon, even if it meant she had to endure the hardships of braces. They both made sure to disillusion them once they got back to Hogwarts.

Harry had been delighted the day Hedwig showed up with his new Amazing Spider-man comic book, and Hermione had to stop him from using the Time-Turner to read it, saying, "We can't just use it for frivolous things. It's only for our mission."

--HP--

With Hermione busily planning their mission to rescue Sirius, leaving Harry with nothing to do, he took on an extra mission – getting to know Remus Lupin better. When Harry really thought about it, about the only time he'd ever been alone with Moony in the previous timeline had been during his Patronus lessons. Then again, Harry hadn't had much time alone with Sirius, either. He vowed to change both of those problems.

With that in mind, Harry walked up to Lupin's office one Saturday that he knew was nowhere near the full moon and knocked on the door. After about thirty seconds, the door was opened and the Defense instructor smiled down at the first-year student.

"Hello, Harry," he said warmly. "Won't you come in?"

"Hi, Professor Lupin."

When he'd sat down inside the office, Remus asked, "What can I do for you?"

Harry decided to act a bit more unsure of himself than he really was. "Well, sir, I've...I've heard that you used to be a good friend of my father's, and, er, I thought maybe...you could, y'know, tell me about him. My mum, too, if you knew her, too."

Harry was genuinely surprised by the large grin that appeared on the werewolf's face. "Yes, Harry. That is true. I did know both of your parents, and honestly, I've thought about talking to you about them a hundred times but never went through with it. I didn't want to summon you to this office and let you think you were in trouble, but anyway, I'm glad you came to me." Remus sighed for a moment as he got a faraway look in his eyes. "I first met them..."

He then proceeded to tell Harry more about his parents than the Boy-Who-Lived learned during his previous seven years in the wizarding world. However, he wasn't told about his father being an Animagus, nor was Sirius Black's name mentioned. Remus simply said that, "Another friend of ours..." whenever Padfoot had been part of the story.

--HP--

Hermione was sitting next to Harry one morning at breakfast when Hedwig flew into the Great Hall and landed right in front of her. She found that the snowy owl had a card attached to her leg.

"Good morning, Hedwig," Hermione said while detaching the card.

"Morning, girl," said Harry as he held out a piece of bacon for her.

"That's your handwriting," Hermione said as she examined the envelope closely, reading her name.

Harry grinned. "You are correct."

Her eyebrows came closer together as she stared at him. "Why did you send me a card?"

Harry's eyebrows came up. "Don't you know what day it is?"

"Friday," she answered. "What does...?"

"The date," interrupted Harry, while chuckling.

"February fourtee...oh." She frowned.

With a genuine smile, Harry said, "Happy Valentine's Day."

Blushing, Hermione said, "Thanks, Harry," before whispering, "Didn't we agree not to be romantic in public until third year?"

In his normal voice, Harry replied, "I've heard that it's good to give any female friends Valentine's Day cards, and you're my best friend." He then whispered, "I know. That's why I didn't get you a gift, but I wanted to at least give you a card."

"I should've gotten you a card," she said with a hint of concern.

"Don't worry about it. It's a standard card, anyway."

"It's the thought that counts and I wasn't thinking about you at all," she admitted sadly.

"You've been busy with your...studying. Believe me, I understand."

"That's no excuse," she whispered before sighing. "At least my studying is almost done."

He grinned. "That's good, and is a lot more important than Valentine's Day." He added in a whisper, "It's more important to treat people with love everyday than to just remember holidays."

--HP--

The next weekend was the Gryffindor versus Hufflepuff match which originally had been refereed by Snape, but was now handled by Madam Hooch like all the other matches. Although many aspects of the game were different, including that the referee wasn't blatantly against Gryffindor, thus allowing them more points, the Snitch did make an appearance very early in the game and Harry caught it, matching his record catch from the previous timeline. It was the only game where he remembered when and where the Snitch had made its appearance, as he refused to watch previous games in his Pensieve, but he would never forget that particular catch.

It was only a few days after that when Hermione told him, "Our plan is complete."

--HP--

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

I'm asserting that Albus has those listening charms in place, but turns them off when he's in an important meeting, such as the one with Fudge and fake-Moody in GoF when Harry interrupted them.

## Chapter Fourteen – Escaping Azkaban

On Saturday, February 29th, Harry and Hermione were sitting at the Gryffindor table in the Great Hall eating breakfast. Neville was sleeping in a bit late so they were alone. Harry was just spearing a sausage with his fork when a familiar white snowy owl came swooping into the room with the others.

“Hedwig,” said Harry with a grin, “I see you’ve got my new comic.” He carefully removed the latest issue of The Amazing Spider-Man from her while another owl approached Hermione. While he was looking at the cover of his parcel, Hermione took the Daily Prophet from the other bird and gave it some money. While it was flying off, Harry gave Hedwig a piece of sausage. “Anything interesting in the paper?” he asked.

“Some dodgy book shop in Knockturn Alley has been robbed and the owner was killed. Many books on dark magic were stolen.”

“Really?” asked Harry. “Does it say what kind of spells are in those books?”

She ran her eyes down the article before finally shaking her head. “No, and according to this, the aurors have no leads as to who did it.”

Harry leaned in closer to her before whispering, “Do you remember anything about it?”

“No,” she quietly replied. “But I wasn’t getting the Prophet at this time anyway.”

In his normal voice, Harry said, “I’d best get to the Quidditch pitch for practice before Oliver comes and kidnaps me. I’ll see you later.” He winked.

“I’ll walk you to the pitch,” she replied.

“Okay.” They both got up and left the Great Hall. Just before they got outside, they made their way into an empty room where no one could see them. They walked out of sight, but left the door open.



Checking her watch, Hermione said, "It's exactly 8:45." Harry pulled the Time-Turner out from under his shirt and put it around both their necks before spinning it twice. After putting on their Invisibility cloaks, they left the room and made their way off the grounds, finally apparating to their destination.

--HP--

"So," said Harry, staring at the fortress on the island that he could barely see, "this is Azkaban."

"Quiet," his companion admonished. "Remember the plan. We'll slowly work our way there and put a small hole in their wards that your form will be able to fit through."

"Should I change into Tox now?" he asked.

Rolling her eyes, Hermione asked, "Didn't you even glance at the plan? You'll need to stay a wizard and help until the hole is made. Then I'll maintain it." She sighed. "I hope you at least learned the spells."

"I did," he assured her. "and I did read the plan. I was just a bit excited."

"Alright. Let's begin."

--HP--

While Harry and Hermione were slowly working their way through one of the most complex warding systems in the wizarding world, following the plan made by the brightest witch of her age(s), no one inside had any idea anything was going on. That included the filthy, sickly-looking black dog that was lying on the floor of the grimy, dark cell.

'Grim,' thought Sirius, 'is a very appropriate form for me. My whole life, just about, has been very grim indeed.' The dog snorted slightly as he thought about the irony that even the name of the street he grew up

on was Grimmauld Place, which sounded like the 'Grim old place' that it was. The only bright spot of his life was the time he spent with James, Remus, Lily and Harry. However, that was taken away far too quickly in one horrid night, all because he'd trusted Peter and convinced James and Lily to make him their Secret-Keeper. They were dead; Harry was taken to those horrid relatives Lily had spoken about. 'Why did I let Hagrid take Harry from me that night?' he asked himself for the millionth time.

Although he had no clue something strange was going on outside Azkaban, he did know something weird had happened inside it. He'd been happy to see Peter brought into the prison months ago and thought he'd finally have a trial, but that hadn't happened. Apparently, he must have been sentenced without a trial as well. 'Probably the Ministry doesn't want to admit its mistake,' he thought, but that didn't explain how they'd gotten him to begin with. That just did not make sense to him.

He'd just changed back into a man when the Dementors came with his daily 'meal,' and was sitting in his cell, still wondering why he wasn't given a trial when a poisonous snake slithered into his cell. "What the?" he managed to exclaim in his weak voice that was hardly ever used. He was about to try stomping it when it changed form into a short cloaked figure whose face was hidden. He didn't know who it was. It pointed a wand at him and silently stunned him.

--HP--

Harry knew he didn't have time for a conversation. As a snake, he'd watched the Dementors (who completely ignored him) leave the area, but didn't know when they'd be back. He took off his watch, expanded it and opened a compartment. He carefully levitated Sirius into the trunk after taking a hair sample, and then put his watch back on.

He changed form again and slithered to another cell. As hard as it was to believe, this so-called wizard looked worse after a few months in this hell than Sirius had looked after years. But then, Sirius knew he was innocent, but Peter Pettigrew knew he was guilty. The traitor spotted the reptile and began trembling uncontrollably. "N-n-no. S-stop. You d-don't want to bite me."

Harry changed forms and pointed his wand at the coward. His green eyes were glaring into Pettigrew's very soul. "You're right, Wormtail. I don't want to bite you."

Peter blinked in surprise. "H-Harry? How'd you..."

"I'm the one who captured you and turned you in. I'd hoped that alive, you would free Sirius. I guess I was wrong. The Ministry is too corrupt to even care about justice, so I've come to deliver justice to you myself, since your life is of no use, anyway."

"Your f-father wouldn't have..."

"YOU KILLED MY FATHER!! DON'T YOU DARE SPEAK OF HIM!"

"P-Please. H-have mercy," he begged.

"Mercy? Like you had on my parents, on those muggles, on Sirius?" He shook his head. "You don't deserve any mercy." He pointed his wand at Wormtail's neck. In desperation, Pettigrew jumped toward Harry, who sent a cutting charm at him. It slit his throat, sending him to the ground, bleeding to death.

Harry closed his eyes, turned and vomited. No matter how justified he was in these executions, he still wasn't used to it. He quickly scourgified the mess, transformed, and slithered to the next cell on his list – Bellatrix Lestrange.

Harry had considered killing all the captured Death Eaters in Azkaban, but decided that he really couldn't justify doing so. However, there were a few that were just too dangerous to let live. Bella was one of those. She and the other Lestranges actually crucio'd Neville's parents until they completely lost their minds. To Harry's way of thinking, that should've gotten them the Dementor's Kiss. They showed they were capable of more cruelty than most of Voldemort's followers. That's not even getting into the crimes they committed after escaping in the previous timeline. Harry had decided to kill Bella's husband and brother-in-law before leaving the prison, and had

another spell to perform on the rest of the Death Eaters, but first, he had a special use for her.

He crawled into her cell and transformed before she even noticed him. He pointed his wand at her as she started cackling, "What's an itty-bitty-boy doing in my cell? Maybe the guards are giving him to me as a present for good behavior. Come here." She began walking in what she obviously thought was a seductive way.

"Stupefy," he said, too disgusted to concentrate enough to cast the spell wordlessly. She dropped to the ground. Harry put her unconscious form in his watch/trunk with the still-stunned Sirius. He opened her door, transformed and slithered back to Sirius' cell. He then levitated Bellatrix out of his trunk.

Harry pulled a zip-lock bag and a pair of scissors out of his pocket and cut out a bunch of Bellatrix's hair, sealing it in the bag, putting it in his trunk. He never knew when he'd need it. He then pulled a vial out of his belt and opened it, revealing Polyjuice potion. He took one of Sirius' hairs and placed it in the vial, then forced it down the unconscious woman's throat, transforming her into his godfather. He then killed her, knowing that Polyjuice wouldn't wear off in a dead person. That's why they didn't discover that Mrs. Crouch had been the one who died in the cell instead of her son.

Once that was done, Harry killed the Lestrangle brothers as planned, and performed a spell on every other Death Eater that made sure they would die if they weren't near a Dementor for forty-eight hours. That would make sure they'd never survive an escape. It was an obscure spell he'd found in a book he'd purchased in Knockturn Alley. The Ministry used to perform the spell on life-term prisoners, but the public didn't like it because there was no cure, so if someone (like Sirius) were proved to be not guilty later, they still couldn't leave the prison. Therefore, it hadn't been performed in over two hundred years. Another aspect of the spell was that it gave no signs that it had been performed, so that the victim might not even know it had been performed. He slithered out just before the Dementors returned.

--HP--

Across from the island of Azkaban, under both a disillusionment spell and an Invisibility cloak (for extra protection) a twelve-year-old girl was pointing her wand at what appeared to be a large bubble of air in front of her, flicking it a bit every thirty seconds. She was maintaining something that could be described as a magical portal from this side of the island to the island itself. This particular method of travel required tremendous effort just to make one that small size for that short distance, so wasn't considered practical at all. However, it did make it through the wards of Azkaban.

Hermione was sweating from the effort, although it was much easier to maintain the portal than to create it. She knew that after this mission she should try to go the rest of the weekend without casting spells to let her core recharge. She was bored, yet terribly worried at the same time, wondering what Harry was doing, if he'd been caught, if the Dementors kissed him. Finally, a venomous snake stuck its head out of the bubble of air and slid the rest of the way out, landing on the ground with a small thump. It crawled under her Invisibility cloak and transformed into her boyfriend.

"How'd it go? Are you alright? Did you free Sirius?" She asked those questions too rapidly to allow him to answer.

"Hold on. I'm fine. The mission was a success. I'm holding Sirius Black in my wristwatch. Can we go back to Hogwarts? I'd feel more comfortable talking in the Come-and-Go room." They disappeared with two small pops.

--HP--

The young couple easily made their way back into the castle and to the Room of Requirement, keeping invisible the entire time. Once they were inside the room, Harry explained everything that had happened, and she was gratified that her plan worked perfectly, and he'd had no trouble navigating to the different cells because he actually had memorized the layout of the prison. They decided to introduce themselves to Harry's godfather.

--HP--

“Enervate.”

Sirius slowly opened his eyes to see the cloaked stranger that had stunned him, along with another one. He really wasn't positive which one it was that stunned him. He could immediately tell he wasn't in Azkaban anymore – not only from the light in the room, but because he did not sense any Dementors. He also saw a plate of food on a table. He faced the two people, and in a raspy voice asked, “Who are you? Why did you break me out of prison?” He knew he was at their mercy for now, since they both had wands and he didn't. That's not even accounting for how weak his time in prison had made him. However, that didn't mean he couldn't ask questions.

“I broke you out of prison because you don't belong there,” said one of the cloaked figures in a voice that sounded like a boy. “I think you'll be able to recognize your own godson.”

The stranger took off his cloak, revealing himself to be a kid who looked almost exactly like James had at age eleven. “Harry?” The boy nodded with a grin, but that brought even more questions to Padfoot's mind. “How could an...eleven-year-old...” Harry nodded, glad that Sirius had been able to keep track of time while in prison. “...break someone out of Azkaban?”

“I had help. This is Hermione Granger.” The other figure removed its cloak, revealing a bushy-haired girl about Harry's age. Harry laughed at the bewildered expression on his godfather's face. “You want to know how two first-years could break you out of Azkaban.” He nodded so Harry continued. “It's a long story, Padfoot.”

“Padfoot?” repeated Sirius with a slight grin. “I haven't gone by that name in years. Where did you hear that?”

“You and Moony told me.”

With a surprised expression on his face, Sirius asked, “Moony? What did you...”

“Remus is teaching at Hogwarts now,” interrupted Harry. Sirius looked pleased.

“Defense Against the Dark Arts,” added Hermione.

“But that’s not what this conversation is about. You want to know how we know about you and how we broke you out of Azkaban.” Harry sighed. “It’s complicated. You see, I’m not really...”

Harry and Hermione then explained about the future, his escape, Voldemort’s return, Sirius’ death, Horcruxes, the many other deaths and their time-meddling, not leaving anything out. All the while, Sirius was greedily emptying the plate they’d prepared him, only for Winky to appear with another one. At first, he seemed skeptical, but seemed to get more and more convinced as the story went on. He was speechless when they told him the story of how his brother had actually died. To lighten the mood after that, they admitted something Sirius had already guessed before they told him.

“A steady girlfriend at eleven,” he replied with a grin. “James would be so proud.”

“I was actually seventeen when we started dating,” corrected Harry. “I was fifteen when I had my first date.”

“Fourteen,” interrupted Hermione.

“No,” argued Harry. “Cho and I...”

“I’m talking about the Yule Ball during fourth year. You were Parvati’s date, although you weren’t a very good one.”

“I suppose not,” said Harry. “I should’ve asked you. You were the most beautiful girl there.”

She blushed. “I wasn’t.”

“Yes, you were,” said Harry sincerely.

“I’m sure you were quite fetching at this ball that hasn’t happened yet,” interrupted Sirius with a smirk, “but I want to know where those Horcruxes are located.”

Hermione shot him a look of surprise, like she'd forgotten that he was in the room. "Oh, no, you need to recover first."

"But I..."

"Hermione's right," said Harry.

"Words to use daily in order to keep your girlfriend happy," said Sirius, winking at his godson.

Harry chuckled while Hermione glared. "Seriously, Sirius," said a still-grinning Harry, "I just got you back and I don't want you to lose you again. You've spent over a decade in Hell and you need to recover before continuing the fight against Voldemort."

"I guess so," conceded Padfoot before changing the topic. "Harry, how much did I tell you about your parents before I...died?"

The three of them talked some more, and Hermione came up with a cover story for Sirius, just in case her parents actually did use their vanishing cabinet and meet him. She was glad that Padfoot wouldn't be the escaped prisoner on the news. That would've complicated things. As it was, they hoped her parents wouldn't meet him until he didn't look like death warmed over. They also told him that there were new clothes for him in his room and they'd get him a black market wand once he was recovered. The last thing Harry said to Sirius before leaving was, "Take a shower."

--HP--

Under cloak, Harry and Hermione exited the Room of Requirement. He was glad that Sirius couldn't try getting out of the trunk while it was in wristwatch mode (although he could apparate out if he weren't inside Hogwarts) because it would be really weird for a man to climb out of Harry's watch in the middle of a Potions lesson. The young couple got to the empty room they'd left from and used the Time-Turner to be there at precisely 8:45 a.m. Harry gave her a quick kiss



before they visibly left the room and separated, Harry going to Quidditch practice and Hermione going to the library.

--HP--

The next day, Harry, Hermione and Neville were at breakfast when an owl delivered Hermione's Daily Prophet. After she'd paid for it and the bird flew off, she said, "Look at this article." She held it up for Harry and Neville to see. The front page of the Daily Prophet had a huge picture of Bellatrix Lestrangle on it. When Neville paled, both Harry and Hermione realized why and immediately regretted it. They tried to comfort him as other people started staring at the clearly shaken-up boy.

Bellatrix Lestrangle Escapes Azkaban – Kills All Her Family Members There

By Rita Skeeter

Death Eater Bellatrix Lestrangle, who was in Azkaban prison for torturing aurors Frank and Alice Longbottom into insanity by means of the Unforgivable Cruciatus Curse, has somehow escaped jail. However, on the way out, she stopped by her family. 'Did she free them?' you may ask, but the answer is no. She brutally murdered her husband – Rodolphus Lestrangle, her brother-in-law – Rabastan Lestrangle and her cousin – Sirius Black and another Death Eater before leaving. Rodolphus and Rabastan Lestrangle had aided her torturing of the Longbottoms while Black had murdered twelve muggles and one wizard with one curse.

It went on to say that Bella's face was also all over the muggle news as well, warning them that she is extremely dangerous.

--HP--

At the same time, in an old abandoned warehouse in London, someone else was reading that same article in the Daily Prophet. Speaking to no one in particular, this person said, "It sounds like Azkaban has gotten even worse. I'm glad I wasn't there. Pity about the Lestrangle brothers, though. They could've been useful servants. I

wonder if I can find Bellatrix.” The newspaper was set down on a table next to a stack of dusty books. The one on top was a large, obviously old, black tome with the title printed in faded gold: ‘Dark Rituals to Make You Invincible.’

--HP--

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

## Chapter Fifteen – Misdirection and Misconceptions

The room was pitch black and quiet as Harry and Hermione crouched down in the shadows. They'd been hiding for over ten minutes and could hear someone breathing near them as they silently waited for the right moment. It was the same day that the newspaper article about 'Bellatrix's breakout' had come out, and the young couple was on another mission.

Just when they thought they couldn't keep out of sight any longer, they heard footsteps, as well as voices, coming from the doorway. They were about to get more company. After straining to hear the voices, Harry determined that their primary target was among the approaching group, so he tapped Hermione on the shoulder and whispered, "Get ready."

Both of them pulled their wands out and pointed them toward the doorway. Someone walked into the room and said, "Lights."

As soon as the room lit up, Harry and Hermione performed their spells while everyone else shouted, "SURPRISE!"

Ron Weasley was standing in the doorway in shock as he watched the decorative sparks flying from their wands like fireworks. Seamus and Dean, who were on either side of him, said, "Happy Birthday, Ron!"

Soon, the rest of the people in the room, mostly first-year Gryffindors, wished Ron a happy birthday as well. Finally, the youngest male Weasley asked, "Is there a cake here?"

Harry, Hermione, and most of the others, laughed at that question while Dean pointed out the Quaffle-shaped cake that was on a table in the corner. One couldn't help but notice that right next to it was a stack of presents.

About a half-hour into the party, Harry was sitting down at a table between Neville and Hermione. It was easy to see how happy Ron was as he opened the presents everyone had gotten him. They weren't much – Harry, for example, had bought him a package of

chocolate frogs – but that was all it took to make the redhead happy. Harry turned to his unofficial girlfriend and whispered, “We should’ve done this the first time around.”

She replied, just as quietly, “I know.” She sighed before continuing, “I think though, that you gave Seamus and Dean the idea. Haven’t you noticed that there have been a lot more birthday parties here since you threw that one for me?”

Harry grinned. “I believe that was the only time I ever surprised you.” He then turned to Neville and asked, “Are you alright? I mean with the article this morning?”

Neville looked surprised. “What? I mean, why wouldn’t I be?”

With a very serious expression on his face, Harry whispered, “I know about your parents. They’re heroes.”

Neville looked down. “Oh. I mean, I know they’re heroes. It’s just...”

“I understand, Nev. If I could keep my story secret, I would, too.” Harry sighed. “I’m sure Bellatrix won’t be coming after you or your grandmother. After all those years in Azkaban, she probably doesn’t remember your family.”

“I hope you’re right,” replied Neville softly, “but part of me wants to get revenge when I’ve learned enough.”

Harry shrugged his shoulders as he tried to comfort his friend who was troubled over the lie he’d perpetrated on Wizarding Britain. “Well, hopefully the aurors will have taken care of her before then.”

“Hopefully.”

--HP--

The next day, Harry and Hermione were at breakfast when an owl flew to Harry. He fed the bird a piece of bacon after removing its package. He was surprised to see Kingsley Shacklebolt’s familiar writing.

Tox

As I'm sure you're aware, Sirius Black was murdered in Azkaban during Bellatrix Lestrangle's escape. I can't tell you how sorry I am that he was killed before he could be freed. What the Daily Prophet didn't report was that Peter Pettigrew was the one wizard Bellatrix killed who wasn't part of her family. Now, although it hasn't been made public, Pettigrew's presence and death in Azkaban is part of the Ministry's records. I think that the 'powers that be' may not be as adamant about keeping Sirius' record dirty now. If you'd like, I can work toward clearing Sirius Black's name posthumously, so that he at least won't always be remembered as a criminal. This will take a lot of time and effort, but if this is important to you, I'll do my best to make it happen. Let me know.

Sincerely,

Kingsley Shacklebolt

Later that day, Harry, Hermione and Sirius were sitting in the trunk apartment, and Harry had read the note to the others.

Hermione looked at Sirius and asked, "What do you think?"

Sirius scratched his chin for a few moments and said, "If my name gets cleared, then I should be able to...resurface as a free man."

"Or you could be blamed for those other deaths," said Harry.

"Or else you'd have to turn us in," added Hermione thoughtfully.

"So, I can't resurface either way, then?" Padfoot asked, looking each of them in the eye.

The Boy-Who-Lived frowned. "Probably not. Damn. I shouldn't have killed those others. I should've just..."

"I'd have killed Wormtail without a second thought," interrupted Sirius. "He betrayed your parents." He sighed. "I know what the others did as

well. I was friends with Frank and Alice Longbottom. The Lestranges deserved worse than you gave them. Killing someone in Azkaban can be considered an act of mercy, believe me.” Black’s eyes still had a very haunted expression in them, from the Hell he’d been forced to endure for over ten years. He shrugged his shoulders. “Even if I can’t reclaim my identity either way, I’d rather not be remembered as a murderer and traitor, so try to get my name cleared.” He then grinned. “I’m glad I named you my heir before I went to Azkaban then. Otherwise, the Malfoy family would’ve gotten everything.”

“Alright,” agreed Harry. “I’ll write Kingsley back now.”

--HP--

The month of March seemed to fly by. Kingsley wrote them back and said he’d do his best to clear Sirius’ name. Harry did get a letter from Gringotts about Sirius’ will reading, and Harry arranged to sneak there using the Time-Turner so he wouldn’t be missed. He was in disguise until he was alone with the goblins, who confirmed that he had indeed inherited the Black family’s entire estate. Of course, Harry had no intention of using any of it. He did take out a few hundred Galleons to give Sirius for spending money.

Padfoot was recovering nicely from his stay in Azkaban with the medicinal potions Hermione brewed for him. He already looked much better than he had the first time Harry saw him in the original timeline – almost a year after he’d escaped prison. He didn’t look like a pale skeleton anymore.

Fortunately, the Grangers didn’t enter the trunk/apartment through their Vanishing Cabinet during that month, because Harry didn’t really want to have to explain why there was a man living there, even though they did have a cover story. By the end of the month, Sirius wanted to go after the Horcruxes.

“No,” replied Harry.

“Come on, Harry. Tell me where they’re located and I can get them. I promise I’ll be careful. I’ve just got to get out of here and do something!”

"But I don't want you getting killed, Sirius," argued Harry while Hermione silently watched. "It was painful enough watching it happen once."

He swallowed and blinked back tears he hadn't shed when his godfather died. At the time, he convinced himself that mourning was useless anyway, and Sirius would've wanted him happy. He ended up wasting an entire year doing nothing but playing Quidditch, following Draco and dreaming about Ginny instead of preparing for war. Dumbledore stretching his three-hour lecture on Horcruxes to almost an entire year didn't help either. The point was that Harry hadn't properly mourned and now those suppressed emotions were close to coming to the surface.

Padfoot walked up to Harry and put his hand on his shoulder. "I know this has been difficult for you, cub, and I sympathize, but I have got to get out of here before I lose my mind."

"There is one Horcrux you could acquire in relative safety," Hermione chimed in. "In the house you grew up in."

Sirius stiffened. "I don't want to go there. That's much worse than this place."

"But it could be renovated," said Hermione.

Harry added, "With Kreacher's help..."

"That crazy elf! No matter what you said..."

"Kreacher's last order from your brother was to destroy that locket," said Hermione firmly. "If you help him do that, it'll help him a lot."

"Fine," said Sirius, giving in. "At least I'll be doing something."

--HP--

Sirius, Harry and Hermione stood outside of Number Twelve Grimmauld Place at 2 a.m. Of course, all three of them were invisible.

Harry and Hermione were under their cloaks while Sirius was disillusioned. Padfoot walked up to the door and grabbed the handle. Harry was looking around to make sure no one heard the lock click, recognizing the true owner, and that no one saw the door open and then close as the trio entered.

The first thing Harry noticed in the pitch black house was the stench. It smelled like something had died there years before. Sirius said, "Lights," causing the old lamps to light, and then pointed his wand at his head and performed the bubble-head charm. Thirty seconds later, the three companions (now visible, and all with bubble-heads so they didn't have to breathe the filthy air) were scourging the floor in front of them when there was a loud 'pop.'

An old, ugly and mean looking elf appeared in front of them and screamed, "Who dares disturb the ancient and noble house of Black? Kreacher is killing the intruders to his mistress' house!" He pointed his hand menacingly at him.

"Stop, Kreacher!" shouted Padfoot. "I'm your master, and the master of this house – Sirius Black!"

The elf's eyes bulged out as he realized to whom he was speaking. "The blood traitor has returned. Kreacher has heard he was dead. Such a shame he isn't. Oh, the shame that Kreacher has to endure, obeying such an unfit master."

"Shut up!" shouted Sirius at the same moment Hermione said kindly, "Hello, Kreacher. How are you?"

The elf glared at Hermione, but was unable to speak because of his master's orders. Padfoot said, "Just before Regulus died, he gave you a job to do, didn't he?"

The elf looked astonished as he muttered, "How does Master know..."

He told you to destroy a certain locket, didn't he?" The elf was silent and appeared frightened. Sirius glanced at Hermione, and in a much kinder voice said, "We're here to help you finish the job, so that



Regulus won't have died in vain." He gave the surprised elf a small smile. "You do want to carry out his last order, don't you?"

"Yes," Kreacher replied in a soft voice. "Master Regulus was kind to Kreacher."

"Then bring us the locket and we'll help you destroy it." With a loud crack, the elf disappeared. Thirty seconds later, he was back with the locket in his hands.

"WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE HOUSE OF MY FATHERS!?" shouted a painting far too familiar to Harry and Hermione. Sirius charged up the stairs and gaped at it.

"Mother," he finally said.

"Blood-traitor!" she shouted at her son. "I..."

"SHUT UP!" he shouted louder than the painting. She surprisingly quieted down.

"Good," said Sirius. Turning to the house elf, Sirius said, "Set the locket in the oven."

"Kreacher is trying to burn this locket to destroy it, but it isn't working," said the now sobbing house elf, still holding the locket.

"Not with Fiendfyre," replied Padfoot.

"Fiendfyre?" repeated Hermione, her eyes wide. "That is one way to destroy them, but it's hard to..."

"Control?" asked Sirius with a grin as he pulled out the custom wand Harry had bought for him at Wendelin's Wands the day before. "It is very difficult to control. Although all Blacks are taught to be able to do that, we don't have to rely on our ability to keep it under our control. This oven can. It was often used to dispose of evidence by previous family members. Put the locket in there."

The elf obeyed, and then Harry placed Ravenclaw's Tiara, which he'd brought along, inside the oven, too. Sirius, with his left hand on the oven door, pointed his wand in the oven and performed the spell, slamming the door shut immediately.

Harry could feel the room itself get hotter, but nothing else to indicate what was happening as the five occupants of the room watched and waited. After about thirty seconds, a loud scream of agony came from inside the stove, followed immediately by another.

"That should be it," said Harry.

"Let's just give it another minute," replied Padfoot. "To be sure."

After another minute, Sirius pointed his wand at the stove and said, "Frigus." It was obviously a command to the stove to put out Fiendfyre, because five seconds later, Padfoot opened it to reveal that it was perfectly cool inside it and all that was left behind were ashes. He turned to Kreacher. "You've done a good job. Thank you."

"Now Master Regulus' last order is being finished!" said the elf happily.

"You're not to tell anyone that you've seen me or that I'm alive. If someone says I'm dead and you belong to Harry Potter, pretend to believe them. Is that understood?"

"Yes, master."

"Clean up this place, too. This is a pigsty instead of a noble house."

"Yes, master."

"Maybe Winky can help," suggested Harry. "It is a big job."

Sirius sighed. "Alright."

Harry called Winky, who happily agreed to help clean up Black Manor with Kreacher. Sirius then gave Kreacher the choice of destroying

Mrs. Black's portrait or moving it to another room that would get a silencing charm placed on it. Kreacher took the painting down.

"We need to put up the Fidelius Charm on the house," interjected Hermione.

After some discussion, it was decided that Hermione Granger would be the least likely person there to be the Secret-Keeper, so she was elected for that role.

--HP--

Harry was sitting in the Room of Requirement when he looked up from his latest comic book at his unofficial girlfriend in surprise. It was the end of March and they had just returned from Hagrid's hut, where they'd confirmed, through discreet inquiry, that none of the unicorns had been attacked this year. Therefore, they assumed that Voldemort had indeed returned to Albania when his servant – Quirrel – had died at the hands of the Goblins. Hermione had just told Harry that they needed to begin revising for the end of year exams.

"Why should we start studying for the end of year exams? Both of us could easily..."

"It would look bad if we weren't studying," Hermione interrupted him.

He grinned. "You, maybe, but me..."

"You are one of the top students in our year," she admonished. "You'll have to study to convince people that you're not cheating."

"But..."

"Your only other option is to start acting stupid and purposely failing your exams."

Harry did his best not to show advanced knowledge in his classes, but he didn't want to pretend he was an idiot and nearly fail every class. If he took that too far, he could wind up failing out of Hogwarts. He actually enjoyed being admired for his schoolwork and knew the

love of his life was correct. He sighed as he shrugged his shoulders. "Fine, but I'll be really bored."

She got up from her chair and gave him a heart-stopping kiss that lasted longer than a minute and sat back down. While he still had a goofy grin on his face, Hermione said, "Now I need to come up with our study schedule."

--HP--

"Gemino!" The wizard was pointing his wand and a small bag of a white powder. It was Spring Break at the school he was headmaster of, so he had time to work on his 'other' job. He grinned as a duplicate bag of cocaine appeared next to the first one and tossed it into the box with the others.

Igor Karkaroff had learned long ago that it was quite easy to duplicate the drugs that muggle scum loved to buy for so much money. So what if it ruined their lives or even killed them. They were worthless animals, anyway. He pointed his wand at the original bag of drugs and duplicated it again.

"Well, well, well," came a muffled male voice from behind him. "I see you're keeping busy, Igor."

He quickly turned to see three cloaked figures, one taller than the other two, with wands pointed at him.

"Are you making those drugs for muggles or your own students?" came another muffled voice from one of the shorter figures, but this one sounded female.

"Mostly the muggle filth," he answered, while carefully moving his left hand behind his back. "Although I have occasionally made sure that the Mudbloods that sometimes slip through the cracks and get into my school get an exceptionally high dose."

"You kill your own students?" asked the other short cloaked figure. His muffled voice sounded male.

With a calm grin, he answered, "Yes, but only Mudbloods," before his left hand came from behind his back holding a wand. He made a quick slashing movement and a yellow beam cut across all three.

"Protego!" shouted the cloaked Harry Potter while his companions raised their shields silently. The curse slammed into his barrier, shattering it and continued. It appeared weaker when it hit him, but it did hit him. It felt as if a knife had sliced across his stomach and could feel the blood flowing from his wound. Concentrating as hard as he could, he sent out a silent Stupefy before the former Death Eater could cast another spell. They had wanted his death to look a drug overdose, so he couldn't use a spell that would cause Karkaroff unexplained injuries. The red beam hit him and he fell unconscious to the floor.

Harry put his arm and hand on his wound, finally allowing himself to react to the pain he was in. He looked to his companions, who were doing the same thing. "What was that spell?"

"Some sort of modified cutting charm," said Sirius, who was now pointing his wand at his wound, healing it.

"Good think it wasn't Sectumsempra," commented Harry.

"That would've been much harder to do silently," said Hermione, who was also healing herself.

Harry pointed his wand at his wound and did a healing spell of his own. He breathed a sigh of relief when the pain ended. "We'd better clean up this blood," he said before pointing his wand at the crimson liquid on the floor.

Within minutes, they'd left the cabin looking as it had when they'd entered, with two exceptions. Igor Karkaroff was now lying on the floor dead, apparently from drug overdose, and nothing magical was in the room. They made an anonymous call to the muggle police to make sure they found him and the drugs.

--HP--

Margaret Tuttle was a hardworking muggle-born woman who had graduated Hogwarts five years before and had opened a small bookstore specializing in muggle literature. It was her goal to help the Wizarding world to better understand the muggles and to realize they were more than an amusing animal to study. She truly was disgusted the way some wizards loved to talk about how muggles did some things as though they were a beloved pet instead of human beings who happen to not have magic.

She magically locked up the shop and activated the security wards, looking forward to a nice, quiet evening with her husband and baby. She noticed that the street was unusually empty, but shrugged it off. She took a step forward, intent on Apparating home when a red beam of light hit her in the back. She fell onto the street, face first, unconscious.

A cloaked figure, wand in hand, walked up from behind the woman. "Filthy Mudblood! Oh well, at least you'll finally have a worthy purpose so your pathetic life will have meaning. Your death will be the perfect sacrifice for the fortitudo increbresco ritual." With a chuckle, the cloaked figure bent down, grabbed Margaret Tuttle's arm and disappeared just after removing the wards around the area that had prevented any witnesses.

--HP--

The news of a muggle-born storekeeper disappearing never made the Daily Prophet, but the unfortunate accident Theodore Nott, Senior suffered in May did. It would seem that he had accidentally Apparated onto a railroad track just before a train hit him.

"How unlucky," Hermione commented as she browsed the newspaper. In truth, she, Harry and Sirius had found him with the Imperius curse on a little muggle boy, leading him to an abandoned shack near that railroad track. All three were disgusted by the crimes against muggles that every free Death Eater had apparently been doing regularly since the Ministry released them because of their 'Imperius' pleas.

"Yes," agreed Harry. "People must concentrate harder on their destination when they Apparate." They did feel a twinge of guilt when

they saw Theodore Nott, Junior crying as he was led out of the castle to attend the funeral.

--HP--

The next month, when Crabbe Senior suffered his own 'accident,' Dumbledore decided that things had gone far enough. He called a meeting with his most trusted staff, Minerva McGonagall and Remus Lupin.

"At first, I wasn't so concerned about all of these happenings, but at least one former Death Eater has died every month for over six months. In fact, I believe that Lucius Malfoy is the last surviving Death Eater to have pled he was under the Imperius Curse.

"I say, let this vigilante have Lucius and be done with it," said Lupin. "He's done enough damage for one lifetime. Look at all the anti-werewolf legislation he and Umbridge..." He chuckled slightly, remembering the picture he'd seen nine months before of her passed out drunk at the Ministry. "...All the legislation they'd passed before she...made her mistake. But Lucius is still at it, and he's got Fudge in his pocket!"

With a twinkle in his eye, Dumbledore calmly replied, "I will admit I'm not overly concerned about Lucius' safety, nor am I planning on providing security for him. My only concern is whether this killer will stop there."

"Albus," said Minerva. "You're just worried about Mr. Snape. Admit it."

"I will admit that Severus' safety is a great concern to me. That's why he lives under the Fidelius Charm. However, I have been wondering if Mrs. LeStrange's unprecedented escape from Azkaban has anything to do with these events. Four Death Eaters were killed during that escape, and it is obvious that she had outside help."

"Do you think she switched sides?" asked Lupin, with a concerned look in his eyes.

“Not entirely,” replied the ancient wizard, “but remember that she was loyal to Voldemort, and him alone. Those that escaped incarceration were those who denied their loyalty to him, so, from that point of view, they were unfaithful Death Eaters and Voldemort might have had them killed.” He ignored Minerva’s flinch when he said the forbidden name.

“What about the others in Azkaban?” asked Minerva.

“I do not know, but it is possible that they had done something disloyal as well.”

Minerva looked pale. “So, you believe that You-Know-Who is behind this?”

“I do, indeed. Who else would be so cruel?” The others were silent for a moment. “Which leads me to Harry Potter. Has he been showing either of you his defiance of authority?”

“NEVER! Albus, how dare you?! You’re the one who let Snape get away with anything! He will not respect small-minded bullies, and that’s all Snape is, no matter how much you trust him!”

“Yet the Boy-Who-Lived has turned you against me already. How long have we been friends?”

“Your complete blindness to Snivellus’ behavior is what has turned us against you in this issue, headmaster,” said Lupin angrily. “I’ve spent a lot of time this term talking to Harry about his parents. He’s one of the most intelligent and mature eleven-year-olds I’ve ever met and is a pleasure to teach.” After a moment, he added, “His best friend, Hermione Granger, is like that as well.”

“I concur with Remus’ assessment of both students,” said Minerva.

“I believe that is the same thing the staff said about young Tom Riddle, long ago.”

“I can’t believe you, Albus!” said Minerva. “That boy is no upcoming Dark Lord, I can guarantee you that.” She took a deep breath. “I think



you're just upset he doesn't want to go back with those...people...you placed him with."

"He must return to the Dursleys for protection, especially with Voldemort on the move." He turned to the werewolf. "Remus, after this term, I'd like for you to investigate these events more closely. The Order will take care of any expenses you might encounter. You're both dismissed."

--HP--

Hermione Granger emerged from Harry's Pensieve with a satisfied grin on her face.

"Well?" asked Harry, expectantly.

"August nineteenth is the date Lucius Malfoy gave Ginny the diary in the original time."

"Then that's the day we'll get him, in Knockturn Alley before he goes to Flourish and Blotts. That way we won't have to search for the diary."

"But what if he doesn't have it this time?" she asked, concerned.

Harry sighed. "Then we'll have to search both Malfoy Manor and his vault. Hopefully, he will have it." Harry paused for a moment before adding, "That reminds me. I'd like to visit the Chamber of Secrets to kill the basilisk before we leave for the summer."

After taking a deep breath, Hermione replied, "I knew you'd want to do that. I hope that you'll at least bring a rooster this time."

He grinned. "If you want to do it the easy way, I suppose..."

"Good," she replied. "I have a few other precautions we can take when we..." She trailed off as a look of concern spread across her face. "Have you figured out a way to get into the Chamber without speaking Parseltongue?"

--HP--

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

## Chapter Sixteen – The End of First Year

“That was far easier than I thought it would be,” said Hermione as she walked outside with Harry and Neville. They had just completed their last exam – History of Magic – and Hermione was trying to act the way she’d done the first time around. Both Harry and Hermione were wearing backpacks.

“Yeah, they weren’t so bad,” agreed Harry. In actuality, he’d done a lot better this time around than the first time he took those tests.

“I suppose not,” said Neville, who’d studied with them a lot, “but both my head and my right hand hurt.”

Harry grinned. “I’ll agree that my hand hurts, too. There were far too many essay questions on that test.” He shook his hand to emphasize his point. After exchanging a quick glance with his girlfriend, Harry suggested, “Why don’t we go visit Hagrid?”

As the three of them walked to the half-giant’s hut, both the time-meddlers glanced at the roosters that Hagrid was keeping in the pen outside his home. They found Hagrid sitting in an armchair outside his house. His trousers and sleeves were rolled up, and he was shelling peas into a large bowl.

“Hullo,” he said, smiling. “Finished yer exams? Got time fer a drink?”

“Yes, please,” said Harry, and the three of them walked into his hut and he prepared some tea.

They stayed inside for about an hour chatting. Yet again, Hermione managed a discreet inquiry into the status of the unicorns, confirming once more that nothing had been attacking them. Harry and Hermione glanced once more at the roosters on their way back. Once they got back to the castle, Harry and Hermione allowed Neville to get ahead of them and quickly ducked into a classroom as they were passing it and used their Time-Turner.

They quickly pulled their Invisibility cloaks out of their backpacks and made their way toward Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom. As they walked in,

Harry heard other steps behind him, but couldn't see anybody. Unfortunately for them, the unpleasant ghost was in there.

"Who's there?" she demanded. "Someone opened the door and I can hear your footsteps."

"We're just passing through, Myrtle," said Hermione as she pulled off her cloak.

"Passing through to where? This is a bathroom, not a hallway."

Harry took off his cloak and replied, "We're following the passage used by the yellow-eyed monster that killed you."

"Boys aren't allowed in here, Myrtle said before a shocked look appeared on her face. "How did you know...Why are you going there?"

"To kill the beast, of course," replied Hermione.

Harry then pulled a glass orb out of his backpack, held it next to the sink, and activated it. The image of a miniature twelve-year-old Harry Potter projected above it and hissed. Although Harry knew he had said, 'Open up,' neither he nor his companions could understand the Parseltongue. It simply sounded like normal, rather creepy hissing to them. He used his wand to pause the recording. There were two more Parsel-sentences stored on it.

Both sighed in relief when the sink responded to the memory of Parseltongue and started moving. Myrtle watched in morbid fascination. "See you later, Myrtle," Harry said before jumping down the hole that was now open. Hermione quickly followed.

Harry landed on the familiar pile of rat skeletons, followed moments later by Hermione, who slid right into him, knocking him face first into the floor.

"Sorry," she said, before looking at herself. "This is disgusting! You didn't mention how slimy that slide was!"

Before Harry could reply, an invisible man landed beside them and re-illusioned himself, revealing that it was Sirius Black holding a cage with a rooster in it. The bird appeared to be squawking, but had been silenced.

After nodding toward Sirius in greeting, Harry faced his girlfriend. "We'll be getting a lot messier later. Besides, you can use a scourgify, or even a shower, later," said Harry as he pushed himself up. "For now, we need to get ready."

"Right you are," said Sirius, before lifting the silencing charm off the cage. The rooster's noise started filling the room until Padfoot pointed his wand at it and said, "Imperio!" He then opened the cage and had the rooster walk out.

"Here," said Hermione as she handed both Sirius and Harry a blindfold. They noticed that her blindfold was on her head, right above her eyes so that it could be pulled down quickly when they encountered the beast. Once Sirius had his blindfold in the appropriate place, she handed him another small blindfold, which he put on the rooster. "We certainly don't want him to die before the basilisk, do we?"

Not willing to take any chances, Sirius slowly walked backwards, using a mirror to guide him. He managed to convince Hermione and Harry to pull their blindfolds down and hold his hand. That way, they wouldn't be petrified (or killed) if the monster surprised them, despite Tom Riddle's assertion that the basilisk won't come until it's called. Sirius said that he wouldn't be missed if he got petrified, while they would be. They'd switched which one was controlling the rooster, so that Hermione would be able to make it start crowing if Sirius got petrified. She had the rooster walking just ahead of her. At a certain point, Sirius said, "We're now walking around the old basilisk skin. You'll be able to get a better look at it once the basilisk is dead."

"Then I'll be able to see if it'll have any use," she agreed.

"Stop," Padfoot finally said. "We've reached the entrance. I'll play that command now." Sirius pulled the orb out and played the next hissed sentence, causing the door to open. He closed his eyes tightly and

listened for any sound in case the snake was in there. After a minute of silence, Harry's godfather whispered, "I'm going to look in there with my mirror. If you hear me fall, or I don't answer you, have the rooster start crowing."

"Alright," said Harry. "Be careful. I really don't want to carry you out of here."

Squinting, Sirius looked in the mirror as he moved it around to get a full view of the chamber. He was ready to close his eyes the moment he saw anything move. "It seems like it's not loose," he finally declared. "You stay here and stick to the plan."

Hermione moved her blindfold up long enough to make the rooster take a few steps into the chamber get out of the way of the entrance (so it wasn't blocking Sirius) and readied herself to command the bird while Harry stayed beside her, holding her left hand. Padfoot walked up to the statue of Slytherin and placed the orb on it. Once it was there, he hurried back to Harry and Hermione. He pointed his wand at the orb to activate it one more time and pulled down his blindfold. Harry knew that the hisses he heard actually meant, 'Speak to me, Slytherin, greatest of the Hogwarts Four,' and was Tom Riddle's voice.

"Be ready," Harry whispered to his girlfriend, who silently nodded. They heard the mouth open and the sound of something slithering.

After a few seconds, Harry heard the rooster crow, "Ka-ka-doodle-doo!" The sound repeated itself, but was soon joined by an unearthly screaming that they all knew came from the snake. The sound was nearly unbearable, and the basilisk's agony was almost felt by anyone who heard the screams, but the rooster kept faithfully crowing.

After about forty seconds, there was a loud thud and soon the rooster's crow was the only sound in the room. After waiting another minute, Sirius finally asked, "Do you think I should check?"

"Use the mirror," Harry replied while Hermione pointlessly nodded.

Padfoot slowly pulled up his blindfold and looked in his mirror the same way he'd done before. He soon saw the basilisk upside down on the floor. The eyes were opened, but they no longer had the bright yellow color Hermione had described from her experience of being petrified. Somehow, they were darker. "I can see its eyes in the mirror and I'm still conscious," he said.

"You shouldn't have tried!" Harry whined.

"I had to find out," Sirius replied.

Hermione huffed at him. "Well, at least we'll make the rooster look directly at its eyes first."

"Alright," he said obediently. The bird, under Hermione's spell, walked back to them and Sirius removed its blindfold. "Okay. Send it back in." She did so, and nothing happened when the rooster looked at the snake's eyes.

Satisfied that it was safe, they entered the chamber and admired their work. Hermione then looked around in awe. "We should take this for ourselves and redecorate." She rounded on her boyfriend. "You never explored this place, did you?"

He shook his head, "No. After I beat the basilisk and destroyed the Horcrux, Ginny and I left to catch up with Ron." He sighed. "I never thought to return here."

"We should make this place ours, don't you think?"

"A New Marauders' den," declared Sirius enthusiastically.

Harry grinned at Hermione. "Sure, whatever you'd like, but we should probably wait on that until next term. Hopefully, Voldemort will be gone by then, so we can relax."

"Alright," she agreed with a gleam in her eyes. "Now, let's harvest the basilisk."

It was a grueling couple of hours as they got everything useful out of the corpse before vanishing it. They put everything, including Sirius, into Harry's special trunk, knowing they had it properly harvested and most of it would be good for decades. Anything that would go bad quickly, they'd sell in Knockturn Alley that summer under false identities. As they made their way out, Hermione determined that the shed skin was too old to be useful and vanished it. They rode Harry's broom (which had been in his trunk/watch) up to Myrtle's bathroom and found the ghost was waiting in there.

"Did you kill the monster?" she immediately demanded.

"Yes, we did, Myrtle," answered Harry, trying to sound kind, "But you can never tell anyone about it. I could get in trouble for being in a girl's bathroom."

Fluttering her eyebrows, the specter replied, "Anything for you, Harry. You're welcome to visit my toilet anytime you want." Winking, she added, "Especially alone."

"Er, thanks, Myrtle," he replied before looking at Hermione, who was grinning at him.

They scourgified each other to the point where they weren't noticeably dirty and put on their Invisibility cloaks.

They made their way to an empty room and went back a few more hours. They released Sirius, who had the rooster back in the cage, from Harry's trunk. He disillusioned himself and went to return it to Hagrid's pen while Harry and Hermione went to catch up with their classmate. They got to the right place and waited. After about fifteen minutes, they observed themselves walking with Neville and ditching him to travel in time. Once their other selves were gone, they took off their invisibility cloaks and left the empty classroom they'd been waiting in.

"Wait up, Neville," called Harry, once they'd put their cloaks away.

When he turned and saw that he was several feet ahead of the couple, he asked, "What took you so long?"



"I stopped to tie my shoe," replied Hermione.

"And I saw her do it, so I waited."

"We only noticed you hadn't stopped, just now," added Hermione.

They made their way to Gryffindor Tower, and Neville didn't understand why both his best friends went to their respective dorms, explaining that they both needed a shower. A few hours later, they met Sirius at a pre-arranged location and he returned to Harry's apartment/trunk.

--TM--

"Welcome, everybody, to the final Quidditch match of the year," announced Lee Jordan.

Harry grinned to himself as he flew into position. He'd wanted to play this match for over seven years. The first time around, he'd been unconscious in the Hospital Wing from protecting the Philosopher's Stone, but not this time. He was determined to catch the Snitch and win the Quidditch cup for Gryffindor this time around.

After Wood and the Ravenclaw Captain tried to break each other's hands as a meaningless sign of sportsmanship, the balls were released.

"And the lovely Angelina Johnson grabs the Quaffle and takes off. Wish she'd date me."

"Jordan!" said McGonagall.

"Sorry, Professor. Roger Davies steals the Quaffle from her. Lousy git! Sorry, professor. Fred or George Weasley – can't tell which – gave him a well-deserved Bludger to the body."

"Jordan!"

“Sorry, Professor McGonagall. Davies drops the ball and Katie Bell retrieves it. She’s hit with a Bludger from the other team.”

Harry scanned the pitch with his eyes as Lee Jordan’s commentary told the story of Ravenclaw dominating the game, and he understood how they’d trounced Gryffindor in the original timeline. Even Wood couldn’t block most of the shots the Ravens took at him. Harry decided they must have studied Quidditch as much as every other subject.

After about an hour, the score was 200 to 60 in favor of Ravenclaw, when Harry finally saw the evasive golden Snitch. Seeing that he was closer to it than the opposing Seeker, who was on the other side of the pitch, he went for it as fast as his Nimbus 2000 could take him, avoiding a Bludger by an inch as he went. Finally, he reached out his hand and caught it.

“Harry Potter has caught the Snitch! Gryffindor wins 210 to 200! And they win the House Cup!” It was a good thing they had won their two previous games and were ahead in points before the game began. Otherwise, they could’ve lost the Cup even while winning the game.

Harry looped the loop in celebration and then watched as Oliver Wood, with tears in his eyes, was presented the Quidditch Cup. He noticed Professor McGonagall smile at him as Wood gave her the trophy. As soon as Harry landed, he was immediately hugged by Hermione, who had pushed her way through the crowd. It took a lot of self-control for him not to kiss her in his excitement. He knew he’d be able to sneak a kiss or two with her later in private.

--TM--

The next day, Harry woke up late, as did most Gryffindors due to the party they’d had to celebrate winning the Quidditch Cup. It was a Sunday, and he and Hermione had agreed to do their workout a little bit later in the day. They didn’t need to use the Time-Turner to find exercise time on the weekends – just the school days – and didn’t want to get too dependant on it for everyday things. He hurriedly got dressed and went downstairs and to the Great Hall in hopes of getting there before the food disappeared.

He found Hermione was sitting at the Gryffindor table with Neville and others from their year, including Ron. He grinned as he sat as near her as he could, ending up across from her and two people down. The food was still present, so he loaded up his plate. "Morning, everybody," he said before he began eating.

He had just speared his last sausage with a fork, when a familiar voice came from behind him. "Mr. Potter, may we have a word with you?"

Harry glanced across the table at Hermione, who had moved there once everyone else left, before turning to see Dumbledore, the one who had spoken, and McGonagall standing there. "Of course," he said before putting the sausage in his mouth and taking a last drink of pumpkin juice. "I'll see you later, Hermione."

"Bye, Harry, Headmaster, Professor McGonagall," she said before getting up and leaving the Great Hall.

The three soon made their way to Dumbledore's office, where the mention of, "Chocolate Frogs," caused the gargoyle to move out of the way, allowing entrance.

Albus sat down at his desk, and with a twinkle in his eyes, offered a, "Lemon drop?" which both Minerva and Harry politely refused as they sat down across from him.

"Professor McGonagall informs me that you are less than happy with your situation at home," began the headmaster.

"Actually, I informed you of that last term, Headmaster."

"Ah, yes, while you were displaying your dissatisfaction with other authority figures," he replied.

"The ones who blatantly abuse that authority," said Minerva, causing Harry to smile.

"I'm afraid I must inform you that it is imperative that you spend your summer with the Dursleys, Harry," said Dumbledore, a bit more forcefully than usual.

Harry was getting upset, but trying to stay polite. "Sir, what concern are my summer plans to the headmaster of my school? Doesn't that exceed your authority?"

Harry could swear that he saw the aged wizard's ears turn a touch pink, but couldn't be sure. That was the only evidence that he was getting annoyed. "It may not technically be within my authority, but believe me that I have your best interests at heart." He sighed and looked grim. "I have reason to believe Voldemort is on the move."

While Minerva was flinching from the name, Harry asked, "What makes you think so?" genuinely curious as to whether his nemesis had been manifesting himself in a way Harry hadn't noticed.

"Bellatrix Lestranger's escape from Azkaban, for one. Also, over the past several months, many people who betrayed Voldemort have suffered fatal 'accidents.'"

It took every bit of self-restraint Harry had to avoid bursting out laughing. "Y-you believe Voldemort is behind it?" he asked, doing his best to sound scared.

Albus nodded sagely. "Yes. I must inform you that there are incredibly powerful wards at your home to protect you from Voldemort...Wards that cannot be placed anywhere else."

While half-listening to Dumbledore's description of the wards, Harry contemplated his decision. If he showed no fear of Voldemort, or didn't take the warning seriously, it would make the headmaster suspicious. But he really didn't want to spend time with the Dursleys. But his mission wasn't about always being happy. He decided that it would be alright to bargain with Dumbledore.

"Can I leave before my birthday?" he asked, trying to sound like a kid.

“I’m sure you’d want to celebrate your birthday with your family,” Albus countered.

Looking straight into the aged wizard’s eyes, Harry replied, “The Dursleys don’t celebrate my birthday, and they are NOT my family.”

Dumbledore sighed. “I’m afraid...”

“Albus,” cut in Minerva. “Surely you won’t force him to spend yet another miserable birthday with those...people! You told me he only needed a month there to renew the wards. He’ll be arriving at home the night of the 20th of June. The month will be over more than a week before his birthday.”

Harry saw Dumbledore momentarily glare at his Deputy Headmistress for a split second before resuming his grandfatherly face. Obviously, he hadn’t wanted Harry to know that information. Harry immediately jumped at his chance. “I’ll leave there on July 21st then.”

Sighing, Albus conceded, “The night of the 22nd, Harry, or better yet, the morning of the 23rd. It takes thirty-one days for the wards to fully recharge. That will still be over a week before your birthday.” He sighed. “Incidentally, where will you be staying after you leave? The Granger residence?”

“Possibly. I’ll have to arrange it with them. A few other friends have also invited me to spend some time at their houses. We’ll see.” Harry then added, “If security is an issue, wouldn’t it be better for as few people to know where I am as possible, so that no one can give away the information, deliberately or otherwise?” Dumbledore nodded. “With that in mind, I probably shouldn’t tell anyone, including you, my finalized plans, don’t you agree?”

Albus looked surprised while Minerva grinned. “I suppose. However, make sure you do stay with the Dursleys for those thirty-one days before leaving.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Harry.

"You're dismissed. Have a good summer."

--TM--

Without Snape cheating, the Slytherins had the lowest amount of House points they'd ever had in history, so Gryffindor, with their recent Quidditch victory, easily won the House Cup, without any last-minute points. Ravenclaw came in second with Hufflepuff in third. At the closing feast, Dumbledore made an announcement that Professor Lupin had chosen to take a year off for a personal matter.

The next morning, Harry and Hermione took the Hogwarts Express with the rest of the students. Surprisingly, Draco did not show up to bother them. "Maybe he's actually learning to leave us alone," commented Hermione.

"Hopefully," said Harry. They were sitting with Neville and a few others in their year, and the train had just stopped. Harry said, "Bye," to everyone and walked off the train with Hermione. "Before I left last September, I told the Dursleys that if I had to stay with them, I'd take the Knight Bus, so they didn't need to pick me up here, so I don't have to look for them."

"There are my parents," she said, and together they walked toward the Grangers. "Hi, mum, dad!"

"Hi, Adam, Marissa," said Harry while his girlfriend hugged her parents. He and Hermione had been sneaking to their house every month to have their braces adjusted, so they were no strangers to him.

"Hi, Harry," said Adam Granger as he shook his hand. Marissa soon engulfed Harry in a hug.

"So, are the Dursleys here to pick you up?" asked Marissa. Neither of Hermione's parents would ever forget the phone conversation they'd had with that family at Christmastime.

"No," replied Harry while shaking his head. "I told them I'd take the WIZARDING bus like I did to get here last September."

“And, naturally, they didn’t care enough to want to pick you up,” added Adam, shaking his head. “How would you feel if I put in a complaint about them to child services?”

Harry half-grinned at the man. “Thanks, but I doubt it would do any good. I firmly believe that Dumbledore has already Obliviated people trying to do the same thing before and would easily do it again.”

“Obliviated?” asked Marissa.

“Erase their memories,” replied Hermione with distaste. “It’s a spell used quite frequently on muggles to stop them from remembering when they see magic.”

Adam’s face turned pink. “That’s terrible! They could do anything to someone – torture, rape – and then the victim wouldn’t remember it! Is that one of those Unforgivable curses you once mentioned?”

“No,” said Harry, remembering the things he and Hermione had caught Death Eaters doing to muggle victims. “But it should be. Anyway, I’ll only be staying there about a month, and leaving a week before my birthday.”

Harry explained what Albus had said, and reminded them that he actually lives in his trunk while there and would visit them (and they could visit him). The Grangers offered to drive him to the Dursleys, so he took them up on the offer. They went to a restaurant first and then dropped him off, making sure that he got inside the house before they drove off.

Harry knocked on the door, which was opened about thirty seconds later by Petunia. “So, you’re back,” she said nastily. “Couldn’t get any of your Freaky friends to take you in?”

“May I come in?” he asked, and she moved out of the way. Once the door was closed, he said, “I’ll be leaving in a month. Until then, it’s the same rules as last summer. Just leave my room alone and you won’t know I’m here.”

“Fine,” she replied, so he walked up the stairs, entered his room and locked the door.

--TM--

At the same time, a rather old couple was leaving Hogwarts Castle. Based off of their white hair and the man's long, white beard, as well as their shapes, you'd think it was Santa and Mrs. Claus. Their robes weren't red, though. They were purple. They had just picked up an item that they'd loaned to their friend, Albus Dumbledore, nearly a year before.

“I must admit, Perenelle, it feels good to have the Stone back in our possession.”

“I agree, Nicolas,” she said. “It's too bad that Young Albus was unable to lure Voldemort with this bait, but in a way, I'm glad that monster didn't come into this school full of children.”

“Quite so,” he agreed as they neared the border of the Hogwarts grounds, where they'd be able to Apparate home. “I'll feel safer once this stone is back under our Fidelius Charm. That's for sure. In any case, we should've given Albus a fake stone to use as bait, and not the real one.”

“Avada Kedavra,” came a voice from behind the old man.

“NICOLAS!!” shouted Perenelle, as she watched her husband of over six-hundred years fall on his face, dead. She turned as she pulled her wand, to see nothing but a distortion. The killer was obviously disillusioned.

A yellow beam of light shot from the attacker's invisible wand, which Perenelle barely managed to dodge, but she was already getting out of breath because her body wasn't in good shape. The next Death Curse to leave the attacker's wand hit its target, and Perenelle Flamel fell next to her husband.

The still-invisible attacker searched Nicolas' robes for a few moments before finding the Philosopher's Stone. “You haven't accomplished



anything in over a hundred years, old fool. What was the point of your continued existence? You were no longer worthy of this gift. I shall make much better use of it.” With that said, the killer Apparated away.

--TM--

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

## Chapter Seventeen – Sirius Horcrux Hunting

### Double Murder at Hogwarts

By Rita Skeeter

Yesterday morning, the Hogwarts Express brought the Hogwarts students home for the summer, and it appears that they left just in time. The reason is that last night, while the children were settling in their homes, an elderly couple that had been visiting their friend, Headmaster Dumbledore, was robbed and murdered at the gates of Hogwarts. It wasn't just any couple, either. It was the famed Alchemist Nicolas Flamel and his wife, Perenelle.

While Dumbledore refused to divulge what item he believes was stolen, he said that it was a priceless magical artifact that he had just returned to them after they had lent it to him. He also said that he believes this double murder was the work of Bellatrix Lestrange, recently escaped from Azkaban....

"What...how?" said Harry eloquently as he crumbled up the newspaper in frustration. He was at the Grangers' house with Hermione, having arrived through the vanishing cabinet shortly after her parents left for work. She had shown him the article since she had a subscription but he didn't.

Hermione took a deep breath. "Well, we know it wasn't Bellatrix who stole the Stone, but that doesn't mean Voldemort wasn't responsible for this."

"Instead of trying to sneak into the castle, he decided to bide his time until it was removed," said Harry, looking angry. "We should've known he'd pull off something like this once I got Quirrel killed! He'll probably be resurrected in a week! Dammit!"

"We don't know for sure that it was him," said Hermione, trying to calm her boyfriend down.

"Then who was it?" he snapped at her.

“Don’t yell at me!” she screamed back. “I’m not the one who killed the Flamels!”

Harry took a deep breath. “I’m sorry, Hermione. I just don’t want things to get worse than they were before.”

“You’re forgiven. Now, to answer your question, I don’t know. There are other possibilities. It could be Snape. He knew about the stone being there.”

“If it was him, then Voldemort has it now.” Harry paused. “What if it was Dumbledore?”

Hermione looked at him as though he’d grown a second head. “Dumbledore? Why...”

“He could’ve killed them himself and claimed someone else did it so he could keep the Stone.”

“I don’t think...”

“Anyone capable of leaving a baby at the Dursleys’ doorstep,” interrupted Harry, “anyone who would subject children to Snape, is capable of anything if he thinks it serves his greater good.”

“While I agree with you about the Headmaster’s questionable morality, I don’t think Professor Dumbledore did this,” argued Hermione. “It doesn’t make sense. Even if he were going to kill them, which I doubt, he wouldn’t do it on Hogwarts’ grounds, nor would he tell the Daily Prophet or Ministry that they’d been robbed. It would only bring attention to the fact the Stone is missing.”

Sighing, Harry conceded, “I suppose you’re right. I just don’t have any other suspects.”

“There could’ve been someone who had planned to do this in the original timeline, but didn’t get the opportunity because of what we did the first time around.”

Harry grinned for a moment. "I suppose so." He shrugged his shoulders. "It could even have been a Goblin who knew about the Philosopher's Stone and planned this so he could make unlimited gold."

"You never know," replied Hermione doubtfully. She sighed. "I'm sure that whoever did steal it will reveal himself eventually."

"Unfortunately," agreed Harry. "What we've got to do now is plan our quest for the Horcruxes."

--TM--

It was the first Friday of the summer vacation. The previous day, Hermione had mentioned to her parents that she might go to the library that day, so that they wouldn't be worried if they called the house and didn't reach her. She and Harry decided to try to stop being so dependant on their Time-Turner as they had been during the school year because they didn't really need to always use it – only when they'd need an alibi. The Dursleys didn't know when Harry was or wasn't in his room, and Harry figured there was nothing odd about him leaving Privet Drive for the day if Dumbledore did detect he wasn't there. He had checked himself for tracking charms and found one, but simply moved it to his bed.

Harry and Hermione had met up with Sirius, who was staying in the now Fidelius-protected Number Twelve Grimmauld Place with Hermione (the least likely suspect) as Secret-Keeper.

"It's good to see you two," he happily greeted when they arrived. Motioning to Harry's watch, he added, "I'm about ready to move back into your apartment. Even with the place redecorated, it brings back a lot of bad memories."

"I know," said Harry sympathetically. "You'll be able to claim your new identity soon and won't have to live here anymore, but it would still be a good Headquarters...if we need it."

Hermione added, "We just don't want you to suddenly appear just before or just after Gringotts is robbed. It would be too suspicious."

"And we don't want you to have your new face until after the robbery, so that no matter what happens, your alter-ego won't be a suspect," interjected Harry.

"But I'll be able to establish my new identity in a month – tops – right?" Sirius asked, sounding almost desperate.

"Yes."

"So, we're going to the Gaunt house, then?" asked Padfoot.

"Yeah," said Harry. "I suppose we'd better get it over with." He took a deep breath. "If you'll hold onto me, I can guide you to the nearby cemetery, where we should modify certain graves while we're there."

--TM--

With three small pops, a group of three, hiding under two invisibility cloaks, arrived at a location that frequently visited Harry Potter's nightmares. He and Hermione were under his cloak, while Sirius was under the other one they'd obtained from the Crouch family (while holding onto Harry through the cloak). The Boy-Who-Lived couldn't help but feel a bit tense here, at the place where he'd seen Voldemort resurrect in another life. They all looked around to see no one in the area.

"It looks like the coast is clear," whispered Harry, before examining the gravestones with his eyes. "This way to the Riddle family." The three invisible figures silently walked in the indicated direction until they arrived. "Hermione, if you will?"

The smartest witch of her ages pointed her wand down at the dirt in front of Tom Riddle Senior's headstone and performed a special spell she'd found in an old tome at Black Manor. It searched for the casket below and vanished both it and the contents so that nothing was left in that plot but dirt and a hole where the casket was. It wouldn't take long at all for the hole to fill itself up so that someone digging for the casket wouldn't realize that it had been moved away and would keep digging further down. She then performed the same spell on the other

Riddle family members' graves. In all, the process took less than fifteen minutes. Now there were no bones of Voldemort's father, grandfather or grandmother for him to find.

The group then carefully walked out of the cemetery onto the road, where Harry looked for the remains of the Gaunt house he'd visited in Dumbledore's Pensieve. They followed the hedge on the side of the road downhill until they reached a very small gap in the hedge.

"This should be it," Harry said, "Although this gap is even smaller than it was fifty years ago." They managed to walk down the narrow dirt track that was being overrun with weeds, getting past the potholes and such until the track opened up at the copse, and found their destination. It was a wooden shack, rotted almost to the core, and nearly hidden behind a tangle of trees. The walls were covered in moss and the rafters were completely visible, due to the many tiles that had fallen off over the years. There was a broken window at the front of the shack, and looking through it, various small animals could be seen nesting inside.

"So this is where Slytherin's descendents ended up living?" commented Sirius.

"Yes," replied Harry as he approached the door, which had the skeleton of a snake nailed to it. Not wanting to touch anything with his bare hands, he put on a pair of gloves and gripped the door handle. When he tried to open the door, it fell from the small cottage, causing a great cloud of dust to form around them. While Harry was coughing, the small animals that had been inside scurried out past the trio, some on foot and some by air, depending on the species.

The inside of the building was disgusting. The floor was mostly covered in various animal droppings and every piece of furniture was rotted through. Due to the stench, Harry decided to use a bubblehead charm, and noted that his companions did the same.

Not wanting to step in the mess, he began scourging a section of the floor so that the three of them could enter. Finally, when they were inside, Harry said, "I wish Dumbledore had actually shown me

his memory of finding the Horcrux, even if he hid his mistake of putting the ring on.”

“Yes,” agreed Hermione, “It would’ve been helpful to know exactly where Voldemort hid the ring, but there’s no point in crying about it.” She pulled out her wand and performed a Dark Magic detection spell while the others did the same, scanning every surface in the house, scourging more of the floor as they slowly moved forward.

After about twenty minutes, Sirius announced, “I think I’ve found it.”

Harry and Hermione made their way to his position and each of them performed the charm, with the same result of the wood glowing blood red. Stating the obvious, Harry declared, “It’s under the floor.”

“Really?” questioned Hermione sarcastically.

“So what should we do?” asked Sirius with a grin. “Blow a whole through the floor?”

“NO!” shouted both Harry and Hermione.

“I know. I know. I was just kidding. I know we’ve got to be careful.”

“Just making sure,” said Hermione as she began running a few spells over that area of the floor. “It’s some sort of trap door, but I can’t find the edges or see how to open it.”

Harry sighed. “Do you think it needs a drop of blood?”

“Possibly,” she replied after running another detection spell.

“I’ll do it,” announced Sirius as he pulled a pocket knife out of his pocket. “I’m the adult.”

“Mentally, we’re both of age,” argued Hermione.

“Then I’m still the oldest,” he argued as he cut his thumb a bit and let himself bleed a few drops onto the appropriate section of the floor. While Padfoot was healing his small cut, the blood absorbed into the

floor, disappearing before the edges of the trap door showed themselves, revealing that it was about one foot by one foot. The face of a snake also appeared.

“Parseltongue?” muttered Harry, shaking his head. “Tommy sure is thorough.”

He took off his watch and set it on a clean part of the floor while Hermione said, “We’re not sure of that, or if you’ll have the right words recorded.”

While the trunk was expanding, Harry replied, “I am sure that Parseltongue is required, and that memory orb is the best chance we have of success, although you are right that it’s just as likely that we don’t have the password.” He took a deep breath as he opened his trunk and stepped inside. “It’s our only option.”

Five minutes later, Harry’s watch was back on his wrist and the thought sphere was next to the trap door. The trio was as far away as possible when Harry used his wand to activate the sphere to show his image hissing, “Open up,” in snake language.

The edge of the trapdoor glowed red and it floated up about two inches before the image of the snake hissed something that none of them understood. Harry shrugged his shoulders and had the sphere repeat the first phrase. The snake image hissed again and a green beam of light shot from that through the orb, shattering it, and into the wall. Luckily, none of the companions was in the way of that spell. Obviously that hadn’t been the right password.

The trap door began sinking down again, and Harry knew they couldn’t let that happen. He sent an, “Infligo!” aimed perfectly at the piece of wood, which was like punching it. This caused the trap door’s cover to be knocked off that part of the floor and slide to the wall. The result was that the trapdoor was finally open. All three companions walked toward the hole in the floor and looked down to see a small, black velvet jewelry box in the center. The hole itself was only a few inches deep.



Hermione performed another detection spell before floating the box up and into Harry's waiting hands. "It should be safe, but be careful," she warned.

Harry opened it with his gloved hands and saw the ring he had seen before in another life. The ring that had caused so much harm to Dumbledore. He looked carefully at the small black stone, as well as what Marvolo Gaunt had identified as the Peverell coat of arms. Something about that ring seemed to be drawing him. He reached for it, only wanting to...

"HARRY!" shouted Hermione a moment before she forcefully shut the ring box. He blinked and shook his head.

"What happened?"

"You blanked out there for a second and then reached for the ring. It looked like you were going to..."

"Put it on," finished Harry, shuddering at the thought. "There's something about that ring that just seemed to...call me." He took a deep breath. "We'd better get this destroyed."

"Then we should head back to Headquarters," said Sirius. "There's no point in wasting the basilisk venom when we can burn it in my oven."

"Yeah," he agreed, and all three Apparated back to Number Twelve Grimmauld Place, where the ring was melted down by Fiendfyre.

They waited, standing around the oven, around ten minutes before they finally heard the screams associated with a Horcrux being destroyed.

"That took a long time," commented Sirius as they waited a few extra minutes, just in case.

When he finally put out the Fiendfyre and opened the oven, he said, "This is a bit odd."

"What's that, Sirius?" asked Hermione.

“Usually, all we have left are ashes.”

“We know,” said Harry.

“Well, with this, there are some ashes, but mostly slag. It’s as though the stone melted down, but couldn’t be actually destroyed. It could theoretically be remolded into a ring stone again.”

“Wow,” said Hermione as she moved to take a look at it. “I’ve never heard of a substance that could survive Fiendfyre before. We should keep it for later study.”

Harry shrugged his shoulders. “If you want, Hermione. I’d just as soon put it in the rubbish bin.”

--TM--

A few days later, Sirius Black walked into Gringotts. Although he couldn’t see them, he knew that Harry and Hermione were under invisibility cloaks following him into the bank so they were nearby if needed. However, this was his mission. He didn’t look like himself at all. He’d obtained a hair sample of a random man in Diagon Alley and used it in Polyjuice Potion that he’d drunk just before entering the bank. The man was about his height, so his robes still fit, but that was the only similarity he had with the balding, brown-eyed man with a scarred-up face and a crooked nose that had obviously been broken at least twice and not properly healed. He walked up to the counter and said, “I’d like to visit my vault.”

The goblin he’d spoken to looked bored as he asked, “Do you have your key, sir?”

Sirius reached into his pocket and took one of the biggest risks of this mission. He pulled out the key to the Black vault. When he, Harry and Hermione discussed the plan, they concluded that the Goblins would be able to tell a fake key immediately and would probably execute the wizard who showed it to them without delay. Therefore, they had to use a real Gringotts key. Internally trembling but appearing calm on the outside, he handed the tiny golden key to the banker. He knew

that at the same time, Harry would be pointing his wand and putting the teller under a Confundus charm so that he wouldn't realize that a man gave him the key to a vault that was not his own.

"Very well," said the banker. "I will have someone take you down to the vault. Slaykill!"

This goblin looked about the same as the others except that he had a distinctive scar below his eye. Sirius couldn't tell if it had come from a sword or a spell and realized that it would be foolish to ask the goblin about it.

Once they were in the cart, Sirius pulled out his wand and pointed it to the goblin. "Imperio!" Slaykill's eyes went unfocused as Padfoot directed him to take them to the Lestrange vault. The route had to be changed, but the goblin had no trouble doing so. However, what Sirius didn't know was that changing a cart from the planned route automatically sounded an alarm upstairs.

--TM--

Harry and Hermione were just beginning to relax when a loud BEEP filled the room. Harry muttered an expletive, eliciting a, "Harry, language!" from his girlfriend. They knew what to do in this situation and were prepared as both sent a spell to seal the entrance to the mines before the goblins reached those doors. They started moving away, but the goblins had figured out that someone invisible was in the lobby and were walking around, swinging their swords at the air.

"Shall we?" asked Harry while pulling a vial out of his pocket.

"No choice, really. Not if we want the ability to fight back without revealing ourselves."

Both of them drank a dose of Polyjuice potion to transform into random inhabitants of Diagon Alley whose hair they'd nicked a sample of the day before. They quickly put the vials in their pockets so they wouldn't drop them, revealing their location while painfully changing form. Once the transformation was over, the couple pulled out their special wands.

“Reveal yourselves, thieves!” shouted the largest goblin in the room, who was swinging an axe around. All the wizards and witches who were in the lobby (which wasn’t many since the trio had chosen a slow business time to do this robbery) were instructed to line up along one wall if they didn’t wish to be decapitated. Knowing that the most important thing was to delay the goblins from interfering with Sirius, the couple kept slowly backing away, while staying ready to fight once it was necessary. The longer the goblins searched for the two of them, the more time Padfoot had to rob Bellatrix’s vault.

--TM--

Sirius was looking like himself and drenched, but had the sense to fire a cushioning charm before roughly landing. He and the Slaykill had just passed through ‘The Thief’s Downfall,’ a liquid that seemed like water, but undid all magical enchantments and disguises as a cart passes under it. It also causes the cart to crash and shatter, which is why Sirius and Slaykill were on the ground. This was part of Gringotts’ normal defenses when the alarm is sounded.

Sirius didn’t need the full explanation of this to see that his goblin companion was no longer under the Imperius curse, so he quickly cast it again while Slaykill was running toward him. “Lead me to the Lestrangle vault, quickly!” Padfoot demanded of the enchanted goblin, who answered affirmatively by beginning to march.

While the goblin was doing that, Sirius downed another dose of Polyjuice – a very special one just for this occasion. In the event that the goblins found out they’d been robbed, it was decided to frame Bellatrix for it. So, they used one of the many hairs that Harry had taken from the crazy jailbird before he’d killed her in Azkaban.

Padfoot was very nervous as they walked past a dragon. The beast’s scales had turned pale and flaky during its confinement underground; its eyes were milkily pink; both rear legs bore heavy cuffs from which chains led to enormous pegs driven deep into the rocky floor. “Get us past the dragon!” Sirius commanded, which caused the captive goblin to pull out two knives from his pockets and begin clanging them together, which caused the dragon to back off in fear. Padfoot could

only imagine the kind of abuse it would take to make a dragon afraid of that noise. "Open the Lestrangle vault, quickly!"

Slaykill pressed his palm to the door, causing it to melt away, revealing a cave like opening crammed from floor to ceiling with golden coins and goblets, among many other assorted treasures. Sirius had obviously watched the Pensieve memory of Hufflepuff's cup, so he was hoping to find that as he looked around. Since they'd already found Ravenclaw's Tiara, he knew that this Horcrux had to be that. He lit his wand as he searched until finally, he saw it.

Grinning, he put his hand around the jeweled goblet, he screamed in pain. His hand was burning, but he managed to hold his grip while pushing it into a bag he'd brought. The whole time, more replica goblets were forming around him, but since he hadn't dropped the cup, he didn't get confused. He forced his way out of the vault just in time to see the Imperius Curse had lifted from Slaykill, and the goblin was running toward him with a dagger.

"Stupefy!" Padfoot shouted in Bellatrix's voice, hitting the goblin in the chest and sending him to the ground. He didn't want to hurt Slaykill for doing his job. He quickly Obliviated the goblin so he wouldn't remember it was Sirius Black who'd robbed the vault. Realizing that he couldn't ride a cart back to the lobby since they knew the vault was being robbed, he came up with a mad plan that would make Harry proud.

He sprinted toward the dragon, pointing his wand at its chains and shouting, "Relashio!" before jumping on its back. It only took the beast a few moments to realize it was unfettered. It roared and spread its wings as Sirius/Bellatrix held on tightly.

--TM--

"Reducto!" Harry shouted while pulling off his cloak. He appeared to be a tall man with light brown hair as the blast hit the goblin's axe, shattering it in pieces. Hermione, who appeared as a straight-black-haired woman, stupefied another goblin. As these weren't Death Eaters, and were actually doing their job of protecting Gringotts, the couple didn't want to kill them unless they had no choice. They were

counting on the fact that goblins don't have wands with which to cast spells like Enervate.

Another goblin charged Hermione, swinging a sword. She moved away quickly, but the sword hit her wand, which fell out of her hand. She dived for it while another goblin shot an arrow at Harry, sticking it into his shoulder.

"Ow!" he shouted while Hermione grabbed her wand and blasted a goblin across the lobby. She turned toward the one with a crossbow and with a, "Reducto!" it lost its head.

At that moment, there was a loud CRASH as the strangest sight in Gringotts' history occurred. A dragon had just busted into the lobby from below with Bellatrix Lestrange wearing a mad grin riding it with her wand pointed at the walls of the bank, blasting a larger exit from the bank.

Harry pulled the arrow out of his shoulder before his world turned dark and he passed out. Sirius/Bellatrix saw that and summoned him (recognizing the disguise) onto the dragon while Hermione ran toward them. Once Harry was secure, Sirius summoned Hermione up onto the flying dragon's back before they were too far away. Soon, they were far above Diagon Alley and headed who-knows-where.

Hermione immediately got to work on Harry, easily closing the wound from the arrow. Since the wound closed with no problems and no scar, she deduced that it wasn't a cursed wound, but that he'd been poisoned. Knowing the goblins, it was likely to be fatal, so she immediately pulled a bezoar from her purse and stuffed it into her pale boyfriend's mouth, then forced him to swallow. A bit of color returned to his face, and within a minute, his eyes opened, although his face was full of sweat.

He gasped for air before asking, "Did we do it?"

Hermione looked to Sirius, who replied, "Yes. I've got Hufflepuff's Cup," without turning around. "Are you alright, Harry?"

"I think so," he sighed.

"I'm just glad it wasn't a worse poison," said Hermione. "Harry, you've got to pay more attention."

"I'll remember that next time we rob Gringotts."

"I think this dragon's going to land soon, and when it does, we'll be its first meal," interrupted Sirius.

"How did you..." asked Harry.

"I'll explain later, but now we'll have to get ready to jump. It's flying over water and it should be low enough..."

They got ready to do just that and soon jumped, landing in a river hard, plunging like stones into the water. Harry was weakened, but managed to kick toward the surface while his companions did the same. Once they were all on land, they Apparated, although Hermione side-alonged Harry since he was still weak.

--TM--

Azkaban Escapee Bellatrix Lestrange Visits Her Gringotts Vault,  
Leaving on a Dragon

By Rita Skeeter

Yesterday, Bellatrix Lestrange, no doubt using Polyjuice Potion, snuck into Gringotts to visit her vault, with two accomplices who were under an invisibility cloak, at first. Lestrange Imperius'd a goblin to take her to her vault and Obliviated him so he wouldn't remember what she'd taken. During that time, she reverted to her natural form. Then, she rode out on a stolen dragon, picking up her two accomplices, who'd managed to murder two goblins in the lobby.

Gringotts goblins insisted that no vault had been robbed, citing that Mrs. Lestrange merely made a withdrawal from her own vault. However, the goblin nation does charge her with stealing a dragon, which was guarding the vault, and the deaths of the two goblin clerks.

They also commented that they'd realized a security risk and would be making sure that their dragons are no longer capable of flight.

An evil laughter filled the room as someone read the account of the bank robbery and looked at the picture of Bellatrix Lestrange on a dragon. On the desk was a large book on alchemy and the legend of the Philosopher's Stone, while next to it was the Stone itself. In a corner was a dead man lying in the center of a pentagram. He'd recently been used in a ritual which enhanced his captor's magical core.

"Well, well, well, Bellatrix. You have been busy. I do hope to meet up with you soon so that you can serve me."

--TM--

Please review. Thank you to those who have.



## Chapter Eighteen – The Death of Kings

It was early on the morning of the twenty-third of July that Harry unlocked the door to his bedroom at Number Four Privet Drive for hopefully the last time. He was wearing his watch, which carried every possession he owned aside from the clothes he was wearing and his wands, which were with him at all times. He closed the door behind him and took a deep breath. He then marched down the steps to officially leave the house for the first time that summer.

He had just reached the first floor when he heard his aunt gasp. “I take it you’re leaving for the year, boy?”

He turned to face his mother’s sister and noticed that the house wasn’t quite as spotless as he’d always kept it. Obviously, the horse-faced woman was having a hard time keeping up with Dudley’s messes. “Yes, Aunt Petunia. Hopefully, I won’t have to return next year, but if I do...”

“Fine,” she snapped. “If you can’t con someone into taking you the whole summer next year then you’ll get the same deal. I will NOT feed you nor tolerate your presence at all. Now, off with you.”

“Bye,” he said before walking out the door. He took a look at the garden that his aunt had clearly not been taking proper care of and walked off. Once he was a few blocks away, he put on a hooded robe to obscure his face and summoned the Knight Bus. He began to wonder if it would be better to use Polyjuice to morph into random muggles whenever he was going anywhere out in public after he got Stan Shunpike to stop asking him questions. It was only two minutes after he sat down that the bus stopped at the Granger residence. He exited the bus, walked up to the familiar door and knocked.

“Harry!” shouted Hermione as soon as she opened the door. She engulfed him in a hug that he readily returned.

“He visited just yesterday,” commented Mr. Granger. “There’s no need for that much excitement.”

“Adam,” scolded his wife while the young couple broke apart. “This time is different. He’s now staying here and won’t have to see those horrid relatives of his for a year.” To prove her point, Mrs. Granger also gave Harry a brief hug.

“Sorry, Marissa,” Adam replied before shaking Harry’s hand. “Harry, welcome to our home.”

“Thanks for letting me stay here.”

“You know where your room is,” said Adam, “and since you don’t need help carrying your luggage,” he indicated the wonderful watch Harry was wearing, “I suggest you get unpacked while Marissa and I go to work.”

“Yes, sir,” he replied and walked up the stairs with Hermione.

“Did you have to see the Dursleys on your way out?” she asked.

“Just Aunt Petunia. The others were still asleep.”

“Oh.”

“I noticed the house wasn’t sparkling like she’s always liked.”

Hermione half-smiled. “She’s probably learning how hard it is to keep a house clean without you doing all the work.”

“Yeah, especially with Dudley around to mess everything up. If I had a Knut for every time I’d mopped a floor and Dud would purposely track mud in, I’d...” He trailed off.

“But those days are over now,” she replied while putting her hands on his shoulders and looking him in the eyes. They heard the Grangers’ car start up outside.

“I know,” he replied, before leaning forward and kissing her.

--TM--

The next week was quite enjoyable. Even though he'd been able to visit using his vanishing cabinet, it wasn't the same as actually staying at the Grangers' house. He and Hermione would exercise outside every day and practice magic inside his trunk. On the day before Harry's birthday, he and Hermione took a trip on the Knight Bus to the mansion belonging to a certain ancient, noble pureblood home and walked up to the door. Harry knocked.

POP! A small house elf wearing a clean, burgundy-colored tea cosy appeared in front of the couple. "Welcome to Longbottom Manor," she said in a squeaky voice before bowing to them. "May Missy be asking who you two is be..." The elf's eyes bulged out when she noticed the lightning-bolt scar on Harry's forehead. "You is being Harry Potter, sir!" she said excitedly.

"Yes, and this is my friend, Hermione Granger. We're here to see Neville."

"Make yourselves comfortable," she said before snapping her fingers, causing the door to open. "I is getting Master Neville Longbottom," she replied before disappearing with a small pop.

"I guess we'll show ourselves in," said Harry before walking in with Hermione. Once the two of them were inside, the door closed itself. They looked around the large room they found themselves in. It was full of obviously expensive artwork and made Harry feel like he was in a museum rather than a home. His eyes finally rested on a plush sofa and he went there to sit down, making sure not to touch anything else on his way there. Hermione joined him just as Neville arrived in the room.

"Hi, Harry, Hermione," he called out.

"Happy birthday, Neville," they said together.

"Thanks, guys," he replied while blushing. Over the summer, he'd sent letters to both Harry and Hermione. She had received hers while Dobby intercepted the ones aimed at the Boy-Who-Lived. Hermione had written that Harry wasn't receiving his letters for some reason, but that she frequently saw Harry, so Neville started sending both

Hermione and Harry's letters to her, while Harry responded through Hermione. They obviously didn't admit they knew who was intercepting Harry's letters.

Harry was reaching into his pocket for his gift when Augusta Longbottom entered the room. She was wearing fancy dark green dress robes and had her gray hair in a bun. Fortunately, she was not wearing her famous vulture hat.

"Good morning, Mr. Potter, Miss Granger," she said formally. "Welcome to Longbottom Manor." Harry couldn't help notice her eyes briefly flick up to his famous scar.

"It's good to meet you, Mrs. Longbottom," said Harry politely. Hermione expressed a similar sentiment.

Fortunately, she didn't say anything about his fame. Instead, she said, "It was quite considerate of you to visit Neville on his birthday. He's never had any friends over bef..."

"Gran!"

"Hush, Neville," she said while giving her grandson a stern look that clearly said, 'Shut up!' She turned back to Harry. "I understand that your birthday is tomorrow."

"Yes, ma'am," he replied, "but today is Neville's birthday." He then held out a small package to Neville while Hermione did the same.

Neville's eyes lit up. "Thanks, guys, you didn't have to..."

"We wanted to," interrupted Hermione.

He quickly tore open the presents to find Harry had given him seeds for a rare magical plant and Hermione had given him a book on caring for it. The young couple then gave an impromptu rendition of 'Happy Birthday to You,' while Augusta looked on with a frown, but Harry could see a smile in the older woman's eyes. Neville gave them a brief tour of a greenhouse that was in the back yard, and then they were invited to stay for lunch, where a cake was served as well.

Harry and Hermione went back to her house a little after 1 p.m., satisfied that they had made Neville's birthday much happier than it had been in the original time.

--TM--

The next day, Harry and Hermione both were on the lookout for a house elf, figuring that Dobby would've followed Harry to the Granger residence once he'd publicly left the Dursleys. It was about 11 a.m. when Harry finally spotted the elf hiding behind a bush in the back yard while Hermione was inside reading. He wasn't sure how wise it was, but Harry decided to take the direct approach.

Looking straight at the little ear that was sticking out from the bush, Harry said, "Dobby, come on out. I know you're there."

An astonished house elf slowly poked his head out from the bush. "How, how is Harry Potter knowing Dobby?"

"That's not important. Have a seat." He indicated a lawn chair near the pool, and Dobby immediately started crying.

"Sit down?"

Harry grinned. "Of course. Come on." Dobby complied and Harry continued speaking. "I know you've been intercepting my mail. I also know your master, Lucius Malfoy, is planning to slip Voldemort's..." Dobby flinched at the name. "...diary to Ginny Weasley so that she'll be possessed and forced to open the Chamber of Secrets."

Dobby's eye grew even bigger. "Dobby has heard of Harry Potter's greatness, but how is Harry Potter so wise?"

"That doesn't matter. What does matter is that I've already killed the basilisk in that chamber, and will retrieve Tom Riddle's diary before it can cause any harm." He paused dramatically while the elf was staring at him in awe. "Which means there'll be no danger at Hogwarts, so no reason for me not to attend."

“Harry Potter is slaying the basilisk?” he questioned.

“Yes. It was simple with a rooster, although I did have some help.”

“Harry Potter is modest and humble,” the elf replied solemnly, “but he is being a great wizard.”

“I need you to promise not to tell anyone about this conversation, Dobby,” he said sternly. “If you even accidentally alert your master, he might change his plans, and then I could be in danger...the whole school could be in danger.”

“Of course, Sir Harry Potter, Dobby is keeping Harry Potter’s secrets even if Dobby is having to iron his hands,” the elf vowed before popping away.

Harry vowed to himself to try and free Dobby, although he wasn’t sure how to do it. He immediately went inside to tell his girlfriend how the visit went. The Grangers threw Harry a small birthday party that night, which he declared his best birthday ever. The adult Grangers gave Harry a Spider-Man novel while Hermione gave him a set of The Chronicles of Narnia.

--TM--

The Grangers, the Longbottoms and Harry did the necessary Hogwarts shopping together, on a day Lockhart would not be signing autographs at Flourish and Blotts, because Harry most definitely did not want to be photographed with the fraud on the front page of the Daily Prophet. However, Harry and Hermione, along with Sirius Black, did make sure they were in the area on that day.

Disillusioned, the three of them were waiting in Knockturn Alley on the nineteenth of August. Harry grinned when he saw Lucius and Draco enter the dreaded Alley and boldly strut toward Borgin and Burkes. They had discussed whether or not they should wait until after the blond purebloods had conducted their business or not, and decided there was no reason to delay.

Sirius Black knew that no one in this part of town got involved in 'other people's business' such as murder in the street, so the plan was a simple one. Padfoot had asked to be allowed to be the one to kill the man who'd Imperius'd his cousin Narcissa into marrying him and made her life a nightmare. While it was tempting to kill Draco as well, Harry and Hermione decided to keep with the vow they'd made to each other before they'd begun meddling with time that they wouldn't execute the kids who hadn't done anything worthy of death yet. While the morality of what they'd been doing was questionable, they did have a line they wouldn't cross. They would not kill someone just for being an annoying git.

With that in mind, the invisible group got behind the Malfoy males in broad daylight and cast their silent spells. Harry stunned Draco while Sirius used a severing charm on his victim's throat. Hermione summoned the diary, which ripped its way through Lucius' fancy robes. Just before Apparating away, Harry silently awakened Draco so that none of the hags would find him unconscious. He still shuddered when he thought of the collection of fingers he'd seen with one on this very day in another lifetime. Harry left before he could see Draco's reaction to his father's death.

--TM--

A few minutes later, in Flourish and Blotts, an owl flew in carrying an envelope to the Daily Prophet reporter who was working the Lockhart story. He accepted the package and read the first letter, and noticed seven other parchments. The letter simply said,

To whom it may concern:

Gilderoy Lockhart, who recently accepted the post of Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher at Hogwarts, has forced every single one of his future students to purchase all of his books, by putting all of them on the booklist for every year. Enclosed is a copy of every year's booklist to prove this.

Sincerely,

Someone who hates to see children being taken advantage of.

After glancing through the booklists and asking a few random students and parents from the crowd to confirm this information, the reporter publicly asked Gilderoy about it, which caused several parents to get upset while Lockhart began to sweat. His face was pale and he was not smiling when he announced that he'd decided to change it to only one book per year, and specified which one it would be for each level at Hogwarts.

When it came time for the photograph, two invisible strangers interfered with that as well. Harry did the Levicorpus hex while Hermione removed Lockhart's trousers in front of everyone while the picture was being taken.

All of this was put in the newspaper article, along with the offer of that bookstore to give refunds to any student that had already purchased all of his books. However, that was not the story that made the front page.

## Prominent Citizen Lucius Malfoy Murdered in Knockturn Alley

By Anna Jesse

Yesterday, Lucius Malfoy, a personal friend of Minister Cornelius Fudge, decided that it would be a good idea to take his son Draco on a stroll through Knockturn Alley. This proved to be a fatal mistake because as soon as they were out of sight the pair was attacked from behind. The boy was stunned, but the man who had made many financial contributions to charitable causes such as St. Mungo's Hospital was murdered with a severing charm to his throat. The boy was revived in time to hear a small pop signaling apparition. It appears that something was summoned from Mr. Malfoy's pockets, but neither his son nor his widow – Narcissa Malfoy (formerly Black, sister of escaped criminal Bellatrix Lestrange) – knows what, or has told this reporter anyway.

Minister Fudge has stated that this is a tragic example of why people should avoid Knockturn Alley at all costs. He further stated that, "Lucius was no doubt on a misguided charitable mission to give money to the underprivileged people that live in that area. As noble



as his purpose was, he should've left the distribution of his donations in the hands of properly trained Ministry personnel. We can only be grateful that the cowardly murderers had enough of a sense of honor not to kill the boy as well. Mr. Malfoy's death is a great loss to us all."

There has been some speculation that this was also the work of Bellatrix Lestrange, who did kill three family members when she escaped Azkaban earlier this year, but there is no proof of that.

--TM--

Once that mission was completed and the diary destroyed, Sirius had another appointment to keep, and wasn't too excited about it.

"But you've got to do it, Sirius!" argued Harry.

"But what if I get killed? What if I..."

"You agreed to do it, and know that it's necessary," interrupted Hermione.

"But I..."

"You agreed that it would be much better if you did not have a magical disguise that could be detected and removed with a simple Finite," argued Harry.

"But a muggle surgery?"

"The plastic surgery will give you a new life," said Hermione.

"What if he turns my face into plastic?" he asked with an expression of fear.

Harry burst out laughing while Hermione was doing her best not to. "Just go. You'll be glad you did it once it's over."

"He said it'll take weeks for my face to heal."

“That’s if we don’t use magic to heal it faster,” said Hermione. “By this time tomorrow you’ll be completely recovered with a new face.”

“Fine,” he huffed. As much as he hated the idea of the surgery, he was eager to start his new life as muggle-born Terry Cochran, and knew this was a necessary evil. Besides, he thought that the face he’d chosen was even better looking than his own and looked forward to charming the witches he’d meet in his new life.

Sirius Apparated to near the hospital where they’d arranged to have the surgery done (under a false name) and was joined a few moments later by an invisible couple. Their job was to watch over the procedure until it was finished, Obliviate everyone involved of the particulars of that case, heal Sirius and Apparate out together. Everything happened without any problems, but Harry soon turned away from the operating table, wishing he’d gone to the waiting room with his latest comic book instead of watching the disgusting, bloody procedure. Hermione made sure to change the hospital’s computer records before they left.

--TM--

Over the rest of August, Harry, Hermione and Sirius noticed a few disappearances reported in the Daily Prophet that were attributed to Bellatrix Lestrage, but not too many. They figured that they were unsolved crimes in the previous timeline, but now had a scapegoat. After all, the Ministry of Magic was founded on the principle that no crime shall ever be truly investigated. The only Death Eaters that were sent to Azkaban either confessed or were ratted out by someone who confessed. In the case of Sirius Black, the Aurors who arrived at the scene of the crime merely asked a few muggles what they saw and Obliviated them, then arrested the wizard at the scene. If Padfoot had left the scene of the crime, he’d probably never have been charged with it. Since no one came forward and confessed to these new crimes, they simply blamed the first person they could think of, who happened to be Bellatrix Lestrage.

During the last week of August, a man with black hair and gray eyes who appeared to be in his thirties strolled into Gringotts carrying an elegant briefcase and wearing a muggle Armani suit with a cloak

draped around it. The man once known as Sirius Black no longer had the aristocratic, somewhat haughty good looks he'd had before his imprisonment. Now his face had a more easygoing appearance and was a bit rounder. His nose was also rounder, along with many other distinct changes that made it impossible to believe he was a member of the ancient and noble house of Black. Because of how different his face was, Sirius had decided to keep his hair and eye color the same, although he had a different, shorter haircut than usual, at least for now. He thought he might change that in a year or two after people got used to seeing him. He was also clean-shaven, something Sirius Black was not known to be. He walked up to the counter.

"May I help you?" asked the goblin.

"Yes," answered Padfoot. "My name is Terry Cochran and I'd like to open an account here."

"Business or personal?"

"Business. I've just purchased premises and will be opening a shop here in Diagon Alley."

"Very well. Do you have your deposit with you?"

With a grin, Padfoot put his briefcase on the counter, changed a number on what appeared to be the combination lock and opened it, revealing that there was more room on the inside than outside, and it was filled with Galleons. In truth the combination lock was actually the setting for which compartment it opens to. The actual security of the briefcase was magically set so that only he could open it. "Will this be enough?"

The goblin suddenly seemed very eager to please, and soon he found himself with a new vault. Instead of the more secure blood identification, he used his wand as the way to prove his identity in the future, for obvious reasons. He couldn't risk them identifying his blood belonging to Sirius Black, and no one had a record of his wand before then, and since he claimed he was from another country, they wouldn't think anything of the fact that Ollivander hadn't made his wand.

Inspired by Harry's tale of the Weasley Twins, Sirius had decided that Terry Cochran's career would be owning and operating a joke shop. Over the past few weeks, he'd acquired premises and made a ton of things similar to what he and his friends had created mayhem with at Hogwarts. His grand opening was the next day, and he'd arranged for all the advertising he could. He'd have loved to call it 'The Marauder's Den' but knew that it would be too obvious and he'd get caught. Therefore, he decided to call it, 'The Troublemaker's Paradise.' He figured that in a few years he could offer those Weasley Twins a partnership if he was successful.

--TM--

Due to the Time-Turner, at the exact same time that Harry and Hermione were having breakfast with her parents and Terry Cochran was having the grand opening of his new joke shop, where incidentally, the Weasley Twins did show up and make a few purchases, the three of them were in Albania. Since they'd destroyed Riddle's diary, they'd spent time in some part of that country every day trying to locate Voldemort. They were relieved to find that, according to rumor, something was still in the forest terrorizing animals and whatever people were foolish enough to enter it. Since the theft of the Philosopher's Stone, they'd feared that Riddle had left Albania.

They'd narrowed the area to a twenty kilometer radius and from the outer edge took readings for dark magic, which led them toward the center. Instead of treading inside the forest, they were disillusioned and riding on broomsticks just above the tree line.

"It seems strongest right below us," said Hermione after a few hours of carefully flying around and taking readings.

After taking a deep breath, Harry said, "Get ready for anything. Let's go." He quickly flew down and saw a large snake wrapped around a lion and just sinking its teeth into the king of the jungle's throat. The reptile's eyes were glowing red. Harry aimed his wand at the snake's head while the lion died. "Sectumsemptra!" he whispered, shooting the dark cutting curse at the possessed serpent. As the head was

separating from its body, Harry heard terrible hissing and wondered what he'd have heard if he were still a Parselmouth and could understand it. A greenish smoke started to leave the snake, but it suddenly screamed something unintelligible and vanished.

As Harry released a breath he didn't know he'd been holding, a female voice from next to him said, "He must have been trying to leave that body for another before he realized he no longer had Horcruxes anchoring him to this world."

"I guess," he answered before smiling widely. "It's really over. Voldemort's really dead!"

With a broad grin, Sirius added, "You did it, pup. You fulfilled your prophecy."

All three of them were ecstatic as they portkeyed back to where they belonged, glad that Albania didn't bother monitoring magical travel. Voldemort was completely dead!

--TM--

That night, a man whose throat was dry from making empty promises and whose hands were tired from taking bribes arrived at his mansion. His wife was away for a few days visiting some of her relatives, so he expected the house to be empty. Unfortunately for him, it wasn't.

Stepping out of the shadows, a figure emerged, pointing a wand at the Minister of Magic. "Hello, Fudge."

Cornelius' eyes bulged out. "You're..."

"You may call me..."

With a trembling, sweaty hand, the Minister reached for his wand, which was silently summoned to the other side of the room.

"...the Shadow of death."

"No!"

“Avada Kedavra!” The green beam of light hit Fudge right between the eyes. He fell to the floor with a look of terror in his eyes.

--TM--

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

## Chapter Nineteen – Returning to Hogwarts

### Minister Fudge Assassinated!

By Anna Jesse

Minister of Magic Cornelius Oswald Fudge was scheduled to have a meeting with Amelia Bones, Director of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, early this morning, but did not show up. Madam Bones immediately contacted the aurors guarding his home. They went inside to find that he had been a victim of the Killing Curse. Thus far it is unknown how someone slipped past the guards, but one thing is clear. Minister Fudge was murdered some time last night. He was still dressed for work when he was found, so it is likely that the killer had been hiding in the house when Fudge arrived.

Although no direct evidence has been found linking her to this death, Bellatrix Lestrange is the prime suspect of this, the latest in a series of killings since her escape from Azkaban earlier this year.

The Wizengamot has appointed Amelia Bones as Minister, and her position of D.M.L.E. Director has been given to former Head Auror, Rufus Scrimgeour. Kingsley Shacklebolt, the most senior Auror, has been appointed Head Auror.

Harry and Hermione gaped at the special edition of the Daily Prophet that had arrived at the Granger residence during dinner. Since Hermione's parents were at the table, the time travelers, who were sitting next to each other sharing the paper, couldn't freely discuss the implications of this. It was the day after Harry had killed Voldemort, and they thought their task was done.

"What's wrong? You two look like you've seen a ghost," asked Marissa.

"The Minister of Magic was killed," said Hermione, knowing it was perfectly fine to give that information.

"What?" replied both adult Grangers.

Harry said, "It's as if the Prime Minister was killed."

"Oh my," said Marissa. "That is shocking."

"Yeah," agreed Adam.

After Hermione's parents had read the article, Marissa asked, "What do you know about this Amelia Bones?"

"She's a fair person who will actually try to get all the facts before making a decision," said Harry quickly, before remembering that he officially hadn't met her.

"Her niece, Susan, is one of our classmates," added Hermione. "She's always spoken highly of her."

"She should be a lot better than Fudge, anyway," said Harry.

"Better? In what way?" asked Adam.

Looking distinctly uncomfortable, Harry said, "Well, based off of his associations, it's quite easy to tell that Fudge was corrupt. He was close friends with the murderers who used to serve Voldemort before he was vanquished – Death Eaters. They'd immediately said they'd been bewitched to stay out of jail, and have steadily worked with the government to push Voldemort's agenda forward ever since."

"At least until this year," added Hermione.

"What do you mean?" asked her mother.

"Well, it seems that every one of them has died in the past year."

"What?" asked both parents at once.

"Most of them seemed to be accidents," said Hermione.

"Although the worst one, who was Fudge's best friend and Draco Malfoy's father," said Harry.



“We’ve told you about Draco?” asked Hermione, to which they both nodded.

“His father was killed and robbed a few weeks ago in one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in Wizarding Britain – Knockturn Alley.”

With a look of concern, Adam said, “It sounds like there’s a vigilante loose.” He took a deep breath. “Not that I approve of that, but if what you said is true, those people deserved it.”

“As far as we can tell from the public records, the only Death Eater not in prison who’s still alive is Snape.”

Both parents looked shocked. “That horrible teacher who got sacked was one of them?”

Harry nodded. “Yeah. Dumbledore personally vouched for him to get him out of jail, and then let him torment students for years, claiming he trusted him no matter how many complaints were made.”

“It sounds like the Wizarding world is more dangerous than we’d thought,” said Marissa, looking worried.

“Actually,” argued Harry. “It’s probably a lot safer now.”

“Those now dead people were the ones most likely to want to kill Harry for revenge,” added Hermione. The Granger parents had naturally heard the story of the Boy-Who-Lived and understood.

“So this vigilante has actually made the world safer for people like you?” clarified Adam.

“I think so,” answered Harry. “And I also feel safer with Amelia Bones as Minister.” Harry and Hermione both knew something was wrong, but after reasoning that out, even if they couldn’t speak freely, they did realize that whoever killed Fudge did actually perform a great service to the Wizarding World, whether deliberately or not. They’d still need to talk in detail about the implications of what had happened, though.

--TM--

"Well, what do you think?" Harry asked Hermione as soon as they were alone inside his apartment/trunk. They'd told her parents that they were going to be practicing Transfiguration.

"Well," she replied while beginning to pace, "Obviously something we've done has changed the timeline drastically."

"I wonder if we've inspired another vigilante."

"I don't think so," argued Hermione. "Fudge may have been incompetent and corrupt, but he was not a Death Eater, so he wouldn't have been killed along with them, especially since they're no longer influencing him."

Harry grimaced. "He may have even become a half-way decent Minister without Lucius whispering in his ear while dropping Galleons in his pockets."

"Whoever did this, I think, is responsible for the Flamels' deaths, and probably the other disappearances as well."

Harry sat down, looking horrified. "It's our fault. We were so obsessed with stopping Voldemort, that we didn't think that we'd cause another murderer to come out of nowhere. We know he's not a Death Eater, unless it's Snape."

"Unlikely," replied Hermione, "but not impossible." She took a deep breath. "Here we go again, talking like the only bad people in the whole world have to be connected to Riddle in some way." She looked her boyfriend in the eyes. "Voldemort did not invent evil."

"We've eliminated him, only to find some other killer to take his place," conceded Harry as he put his head in his hands. "Why can't anything ever just go right?"

"You do know that we'll have to somehow stop this person, don't you?" asked Hermione. "We are responsible."

Harry took a deep breath as he nodded. "I know," he mumbled. "Just when I thought we would be able to relax and live happily ever after."

--TM--

The next day had an article in the Daily Prophet where Dumbledore was interviewed and said that he believed that all the recent disappearances and deaths were the work of Bellatrix Lestrange and were part of an effort to bring back You-Know-Who.

"Obviously the reporter replaced the name Voldemort," said Harry with a grin. "They're still afraid of that corpse."

"Well," said Hermione, "They don't know that he's been completely eliminated."

"But they also don't know that he survived Godric's Hollow," countered Harry.

"It seems that Dumbledore is truly convinced that Voldemort will return soon," said Hermione. "Shouldn't he be trying to train you to fight him?"

Harry laughed. "Don't you remember what Dumbledore's...ghost told us?" said Harry as he recounted their conversation with Albus in the in-between place after they'd died. "He expected me to let Riddle Avada Kedavra me. That was his plan."

"That was so preposterous! I mean, even if you purposely dropped your guard, there are a million other curses he could use on you beside the Killing Curse. Ones that would be painful, so he could..." She closed her mouth, not bearing to say what she was thinking.

"Enjoy watching me die a slow, agonizing death? Yep. Since he had problems with that curse ten years ago, I'd say he'd be less likely to try it again. Sectumsempra would work just as well for him, and that wouldn't have eliminated the Horcrux. And he'd have enjoyed watching me bleed to death while letting his followers use the Cruciatus on me."

“Yeah.”

--TM--

The summer ended quickly after that, with Harry and Hermione continuing to train so that they'd be able to fight the new rising evil once they had a clue where to find him. Harry had decided that no matter what, he wasn't going to return to the Dursleys. Whatever dubious protection was there, it was made to only protect him from Voldemort and Death Eaters, not every wizard in the world. Also, with all the Death Eaters taken care of, there were much fewer people who would try to kill him around.

Harry had Sirius (as Terry Cochran) send a letter to Narcissa Malfoy offering to purchase Dobby to help him with his joke shop. She had been reluctant to sell a house elf to a muggle-born, but had needed the money with Lucius no longer robbing muggles to provide for his family's luxurious needs. Harry and Hermione weren't sure whether Narcissa was actually a Death Eater or not, and didn't consider her a threat. Besides, Harry didn't really want to make Draco an orphan. For those reasons, they'd let her live, but would be watching her. In the end, Terry and Narcissa came to a deal, so Dobby was working at The Troublemaker's Paradise. They hadn't yet decided whether or not to let Dobby know his new master's true identity, but the main point was that the elf was no longer being abused. His first order had been to never punish himself.

--TM--

“Stay safe, Hermione,” said Marissa Granger as she hugged her daughter goodbye. “I love you.” The Grangers and Harry had just arrived on Platform Nine and Three Quarters about twenty minutes before the train was scheduled to leave. Harry had breathed a sigh of relief when he found that the barrier hadn't been sealed, even though he knew Dobby had no reason to prevent him from attending Hogwarts.

“I will,” replied Hermione. “I love you, too.”

“Take care, Harry,” said Adam Granger, while shaking the Boy-Who-Lived’s hand. “And try to keep an eye on my daughter.”

With a grin, Harry answered, “As much as she’ll let me.”

In a low voice, Adam added, “Don’t forget your appointments to have your braces adjusted.”

“We won’t.”

After Marissa had hugged Harry while Adam hugged Hermione, the two kids boarded the train. It only took a few minutes to find a compartment with only one occupant – Neville Longbottom.

“Hey, Nev,” said Harry as the young couple sat down.

“Hi guys.” After a moment, Neville looked slightly confused. “Where are your trunks?”

“Oh,” said Harry with a grin. “They’re in my watch. It’s actually a shrunken trunk and has plenty of room to store another one in it.” He didn’t want to tell Neville everything about his trunk, but didn’t see any harm in this information.

“You had that watch all last year,” he replied suspiciously.

“Er, well, that’s because Hagrid took me to Diagon Alley last year and had me get a regular trunk. I went back and bought this. I wasn’t sure if I’d get in trouble for doing that or not, so I kept it secret last year.”

“Oh.”

“How was your summer, Neville?” asked Hermione, changing the subject. Before he could answer, the compartment door was opened and all three occupants turned their attention to face a little girl who had red hair and a trunk almost bigger than she was. Neither Harry nor Hermione would ever mistake that girl for someone else. Harry blinked for a moment at the memory that this girl, along with Luna, Parvati and Cho, had been killed by the Death Eaters simply for having dated him briefly.

“Er, hello,” said the slightly shy girl. “Can I sit here? My family got here a bit late, so everywhere else seems full.”

“Sure, come on in. I’m Neville Longbottom.”

“Ginny Weasley. Thanks.”

“Weasley?” asked Harry, pretending to not already know her. “Are you related to...”

“I have four brothers on this train,” she interrupted. “And none of them wants to sit with their little sister.”

“Gits,” muttered Harry as he and Neville got up and put her trunk on the luggage rack.

“Thanks. I didn’t catch your names.” She indicated the Boy-Who-Lived and the Girl-He-Loved.

“I’m Hermione Granger and this is...Harry Potter.”

“Eep!” exclaimed Ginny as her eyes bulged out. Harry could see them look up toward his famous scar before her complexion paled. He couldn’t help but grinning as the girl quickly sat down stiffly. It took all his efforts to stop himself from laughing.

He sat down next to Hermione and deliberately put his left arm around her. She smiled in appreciation. This was the most public display of affection they’d ever done (in the future, they hadn’t been in the public and now they were waiting until 3rd year to date) and she knew it was to make things clear to Ginny. Harry grinned at the redhead.

“If you’d like to join the Boy-Who-Lived fan club, I’m sure you can find a member in another compartment that’ll sell you a headband with a lightning bolt on it. If you’d like to be friends, then my name is Harry – just Harry.” He reached out his hand in front of her and she shyly took it, shaking his hand.

"Sorry," Ginny said. "I just..."

"It's alright. A lot of people have that sort of reaction to meeting me, but the fact is that no one knows what happened that night, and I just want to be a normal kid."

"Despite being the youngest Seeker in a century?" asked Ginny with a slight blush.

"Yes," agreed Harry with a shrug. "Despite that." Hermione giggled slightly at that. With a grin, Harry tightened his half-hug for a moment and turned his head to face her. "Are you laughing at me?"

"Of course not. I'm laughing with you."

"I guess I must not have realized I was laughing," he replied playfully, while gazing into his girlfriend's eyes.

"You were," she replied with a smirk.

"Oh," he replied softly. "I guess I must've been."

Although it was easy for the couple to get lost in each other's gaze, they didn't completely allow that to happen in this instance. Part of it was an act to completely dispel any romantic intentions Ginny may have regarding the Boy-Who-Lived. Out of the corner of Harry's eye, he saw Ginny's face get slightly downcast at the obvious affection between Harry and Hermione. He was surprised, though pleased, when Neville softly commented, "You'll have to get used to those two. They seem to disappear into their own little world like that all the time. You'd almost think they were married."

"Are...are they dating?" whispered the redhead.

"They claim not," replied Neville, "but I think they either are or soon will be. They've been inseparable since they met a year ago."

"I see," replied a slightly downcast Ginny.

Hermione thought Ginny had seen enough, so she turned from Harry, still keeping his arm around her shoulders, and asked, "What house do you think you'll be sorted into?"

After Ginny firmly answered, "Gryffindor," the conversation went back to normal.

After being informed that every Weasley in living memory had been in the lion house, Harry noticed someone familiar with blond hair approaching their compartment door. Walking with confidence, head in the air, apparently without a care in the world, this person knocked on the door. Harry couldn't help but notice that flanked on either side of this individual were...radish earrings. Harry smiled and sent a spell at the door, which immediately opened.

A first-year Luna Lovegood, dressed in a pants with one leg yellow, one leg pink, and the rest orange, Hawaiian shirt and butterbeer cap necklace, one red boot and one purple shoe, pulled a trunk on wheels behind her. The piece of luggage seemed completely covered in stickers that seemed to depict different forests she'd been in, with drawings of magical creatures moving all over, switching from sticker to sticker. Harry was willing to bet that at least one of them was supposed to be a crumple-horned Snorkack. As usual, her wand was behind her ear.

"Hello," she said calmly without preamble. "My name is Luna Lovegood. Could I sit here? I suspect most people believe I'm infested with Nargles since they don't want me to sit with them."

As usual, Harry was taken aback by how easily the girl talked about others not wanting to be near her. "You can sit here, Luna."

"Thank you, Harry Potter," she replied dreamily. He hadn't even seen her notice his scar.

After introductions were made, and Luna revealed she already did know Ginny, she sat next to the redhead and across from Harry and Hermione. She seemed to study the couple for a few seconds before pulling a Quibbler out of her pocket and beginning to read.



They continued like that in the compartment for the entire trip. When the snack trolley showed up, they each got something. Harry thought it was odd that Draco didn't 'grace them with his presence,' but then again, he'd just lost his father a few weeks before, so he might not be in the mood. When it was about time, the boys left the compartment to allow the girls to change, and then vice-versa. After the train stopped, Neville and Ginny left the compartment first. As Hermione was leaving the room, Luna's eyes got even more expressionless than usual. In an eerily unearthly voice, she began to speak.

"A Shadow of Pain is rising. The boy twice born who has vanquished the Dark Lord will now face this new evil. Crueler than the Dark Lord and twice as foul, the Light created this Shadow...it has the power to cover the world in darkness, extinguishing the Light...yet his Lady of Light stands with him...together, the lovers twice born, the meddlers with time, must shine through the Dark Shadow or fate will destroy the world. A Shadow of Pain is rising..."

--TM--

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

## Chapter Twenty – Preparing for a New War

Harry and Hermione stared at Luna Lovegood in shock. Neither of them had known she was a Seer, but then again, neither had asked her. Hermione glanced toward the hallway, glad to see Neville and Ginny were too far away to hear, while Luna's eyes went to their normal vacant expression.

She blinked and asked, "Why are you staring at me? Did a Wrackspurt enter my mind again?"

"Er, that must be it, Luna," answered Harry. "We'd better get moving or the train will take off with us still aboard."

"Oh, I don't think they'd do that, unless someone was hiding under an Invisibility Cloak or something."

Harry blinked as he instantly recalled Malfoy hiding him under his cloak just before 6th year began. "I'd still like to get there."

"You're right. There will probably be pudding."

They quickly dismounted and caught up with Neville and Ginny. The two younger girls went off with Hagrid when he called, "First years!" while the remaining trio headed toward the thestral-drawn carriages. They hardly paid any attention to the conversation they had with Neville as they longed for privacy to discuss this new prophecy. Harry even considered using the Time-Turner, but he couldn't do that without letting Neville see it. Besides, he and Hermione had agreed that they wanted to stop using it for every little thing. Their discussion could wait. Besides, Harry was hungry.

--TM--

About an hour later, the students in the Great Hall were just finishing their desserts. The sorting had occurred with Ginny making Gryffindor and Luna making Ravenclaw. Harry and Hermione had hoped Luna would be a Gryffindor this time around, but obviously hadn't had enough time to influence her enough to request it. They still vowed to

try to help Luna in any way they could because they knew the Lovegood girl had a rough time there.

“Look over there.” Hermione’s command brought Harry out of his thoughts. He moved his gaze to where his girlfriend was pointing and grinned as he saw none other than Cedric Diggory, wearing a brand new prefect badge, leading the first-year Hufflepuffs out of the room.

“It’s good to see him alive,” he whispered to Hermione. “I hardly got a glimpse of him last year.”

After walking with Neville and a few other Gryffindors to their dormitory, the couple agreed to meet later on that night, once everyone was asleep.

--TM--

“So, what do you think?” asked Hermione. It was just after midnight and they had snuck into the Come and Go Room.

“It’s too bad Luna didn’t get sorted into Gryffindor.”

“Yes it is,” she hissed, annoyed, “but you know what I’m talking about.”

He took a deep breath. “Yeah. The prophecy is real. Trelawney was just like that when she made her two.”

“We need to break it down to figure out exactly what it means.” Using Harry’s Pensieve to relive the prophecy, they quickly were able to write down every word of it.

“A Shadow of Pain is rising,” read Hermione before sighing. “That doesn’t sound very pleasant.”

“Nope,” agreed Harry. “It must be about the deaths and disappearances that have been happening, though.”

“Agreed.” She looked thoughtful. “It has all been done with no witnesses, so you could say it was done in shadow.”

"But so far the killings have been Avada Kedavra's, which are supposed to be painless."

"There have been disappearances as well," countered Hermione, "and who knows what happened to them." She closed her eyes in grief. "And more is probably coming."

"Very likely," agreed Harry. "What's the next line?"

"The boy twice born who has vanquished the Dark Lord will now face this new evil." Hermione grimaced and looked at her boyfriend. "You're going to have to face this Dark Lord, too."

He nodded his head while muttering, "Dammit. Why can't they leave me alone?" Hermione reached out and took his hand in hers.

Hermione continued. "Crueler than the Dark Lord and twice as foul, the Light created this Shadow..."

"So we're right," said Harry. "It is our fault somehow."

"I guess so," she nodded sadly. "And this new evil sounds like he's even more pleasant company than Voldemort."

"Looks like," he said with a smirk.

"It has the power to cover the world in darkness, extinguishing the Light..."

"So this evil can win," muttered Harry. "I suppose I'm the light he can extinguish."

Hermione grimaced as she read, "Yet his Lady of Light stands with him..."

Harry squeezed her hand and looked at her with love in his eyes. "As always."

"As always." It took a great determination not to kiss at that moment, but Hermione managed to move her gaze back at the parchment to read, "Together, the lovers twice born, the meddlers with time, must shine through the Dark Shadow or fate will destroy the world."

After taking a deep breath, Harry concluded, "We're going to have to work together or fate will get even with us for changing history."

"By destroying the whole world?" questioned Hermione.

"Looks like it." Harry looked at his feet for about a minute as they sat in silence. He finally raised his head and asked, "So what are we gonna do about it?"

"If we were Dumbledore, we'd do nothing and let events unfold," said Hermione in a calm tone of voice reminiscent of the old man.

"Do I look like Dumbledore?" he asked with a mock glare.

"Of course not. I'd never kiss you if you had a beard like that. Gross!"

Harry chuckled at that before he took on a serious expression. He grimly stated, "We've got to prepare for a new war."

"Agreed. First, we need to continue our training..." Harry nodded. "...and we need a new D.A."

Harry stared at her for about thirty seconds before replying. "While I agree that it would help to train the students since they'll likely be victims, no one is going to want to learn defense from a second year – no matter how pathetic Lockhart is."

"I know that, Harry," she answered him. "You're not the only person in Hogwarts that's good at defense. We'll simply have to ask someone else, an upper classman, to start up a dueling club."

A huge grin came on Hermione's face as Harry asked, "Who?"

--TM--

While Harry did agree with his girlfriend's suggestion of which student to ask to run a dueling club, they both agreed to wait a few weeks so that this person could experience a few Lockhart lessons and realize the need for extra help in that subject. For now, Harry decided to concentrate on more ways to humiliate Gilderoy, one small prank at a time. At least he made sure each student only had to get one of the stupid books. For second years, it was 'Gadding with Ghouls.' Harry briefly considered trying to sneak the Weasleys' ghoul to his DADA class to scare Lockhart, but knew the poor thing was comfortable where he was in the Burrow's attic. For now, Harry felt the class would enjoy his and Hermione's first prank.

Lockhart did his introduction the same way that he did the last time around, but his pop quiz was different. He only had questions taken out of the one book for this class. While there were some of the original questions, like what Gilderoy Lockhart's secret ambition is (although if it's published, how is it secret?) and his greatest achievement to this date (which Harry wrote was getting to teach at Hogwarts). However, due to lack of content, a few of the questions weren't pointless. For example, one asked what a ghoul was, which is an important question for anyone who might deal with a ghoul.

After Lockhart had graded the tests, he began his lesson on, "...Freshly caught Cornish Pixies."

Seamus Finnigan couldn't control himself. He let out a snort of laughter that even Lockhart couldn't mistake for a scream of terror. Hermione took advantage of this distraction to perform a silent spell on the cage while Harry put a notice-me-not charm on her.

By the time the spells had been cast (including removing the notice-me-not from Hermione, Lockhart was saying, "Let's see what you make of them!" He then grabbed the cage door to open it, but it didn't open. Lockhart's toothy smile faded for a moment, and he tried again. "Hehe. This door seems a bit stuck. It'll only be a moment." He turned his full attention to the cage, where the pixies were getting even more upset than he'd already made them by tapping his wand on the cage while introducing them to the class.

He made a two-handed yank on the cage door, but all that happened was the cage itself nearly falling. He then pulled out his wand as the class watched. Harry had already heard a few snickers from other students. "Al-More-Al!" Lockhart shouted, showing his lack of knowledge of spell pronunciation. When nothing happened, Gilderoy tapped this wand on the cage while repeating that spell, and Harry found himself wishing that wand would break, but that would be too lucky. "Sometimes it helps if your wand is actually touching the target with that spell," he commented, trying to look calm despite his reddening complexion and the sweat forming on his brow.

Hermione raised her hand. When he called on her, she asked, "Isn't the spell Alohomora?"

"Right you are, Miss Granger. Right you are," he replied with his fake smile. Ten points for catching my deliberate error. I was hoping that one of you would notice that." He turned his attention back to the cage and said, "Alohomora!" causing a clicking noise to come from the door for a moment, but it didn't unlock. The pixies were getting even more annoyed.

He kept trying different ways to get the cage open over the next five minutes, agitating the pixies more every second. When he began to stick his wand into the cage door, Harry thought for sure it would break. But what happened instead was that the pixies together grabbed the wand and pulled it inside their cage so Lockhart couldn't touch it. "Give me that back, you bloody insects!" he shouted at them, even throwing the cage on the ground in fury before noticing the laughter coming from the class. He turned toward them, with another fake smile, and said, "Class dismissed."

Harry and Hermione made sure to be among the last out of the room, and Hermione sent a spell to open the cage door, freeing the angry pixies, just before closing the classroom door, making sure Gilderoy didn't see who did it. Then she locked the classroom door so he couldn't escape.

--TM--

The next time Lockhart was spotted, he was completely disheveled and bruised, headed toward the hospital wing. Rumors of students seeing Cornish Pixies flying throughout the castle were being spread around rather quickly.

The next few weeks passed easily. Harry sent a certain form (through muggle post and using the Grangers' address for the reply) to the Dursleys during the first week, and his Marauder name – Tox – received a letter from Kingsley Shacklebolt.

Tox,

I thought I'd let you know that Sirius Black's posthumous case is now coming under review with Amelia Bones as Minister, as well as the other changes she has created. I'm sure you read that I'm now Head Auror, which has kept me rather busy these past few weeks.

I believe that under the new administration, Black's name will be cleared soon. It is too bad that Madam Bones wasn't already Minister when you brought us Pettigrew.

Kingsley Shacklebolt,

Head Auror

"That's good news," Harry commented before handing the note to Hermione. Luckily, Neville hadn't arrived at breakfast yet so he wouldn't have questions about the note. Harry and Hermione had begun actually waking up early to do their daily training rather than using the Time-Turner for it, which resulted in them being among the first in the Great Hall every morning. It had been a few months since they'd heard from Kingsley, so they were wondering about his progress, but did understand that these things took time, especially while everyone involved is getting used to a new promotion. They made sure to pass the news onto Terry Cochran (Sirius Black's alias – they had made it a point to start using it all the time so that they wouldn't mess up when they publicly met him at his shop and became friends).

--TM--



It was September 17th, just a few days before Hermione's birthday, when Harry finally approached the person she'd suggested would be a good leader for a defense club. Dinner was getting over when he saw the fifth-year prefect get up from the Hufflepuff table. Harry put down his fork and got up while muttering, "I've got to go." Hermione understood exactly why, but Neville didn't know what Harry was up to, but saw no reason to object.

"We'll see you later," the Longbottom boy replied.

"Bye, Harry," said Hermione as Harry left the Great Hall in a hurry to catch up to his former co-champion in another life.

He saw his quarry walking toward his Common Room with a few other Hufflepuffs that appeared to be his age. Realizing that at this time, Harry had no reason to make sure no one knew he was talking to this person, he did not make his bag rip. Instead, he called, "Cedric...Cedric Diggory," as he hurried toward them.

The Puffs stopped and turned around. The prefect spoke. "Yes..." His eyes flicked up to the most famous scar in the Wizarding world. "Harry Potter. What can I do for you?"

"Can I speak with you alone?"

Looking very curious, Cedric replied, "Alright." He turned to his friends. "I'll catch up with you later."

"Sure, Ced," they answered and walked off. Harry and Cedric walked to an empty classroom.

When Harry closed the door, Diggory asked, "What's this all about?"

Suddenly feeling nervous, Harry shuffled his feet for a few seconds before asking, "I'm sure you've had a few Defense Against the Dark Arts lessons with Lockhart by now?"

"Yeah."

“What do you think of him?”

“Er,” Cedric replied nervously, as though he didn’t want to badmouth a teacher. “I’ve had better teachers. Why?”

“Well, I, er, don’t think he’s really half as skilled as he claims, and some of the events in his books make no sense.”

“I guess I’ll agree with you. Why do you ask?”

Harry took a deep breath. “I don’t think anyone is learning Defense properly from Lockhart, and I for one want to be able to defend myself.”

Nodding, Cedric said, “I suppose there are people out there who would like to get revenge on you.”

“That’s true,” said Harry hesitantly, “but I think a lot more people than me need to learn that subject. I think there should be a Defense club at Hogwarts for us to learn properly.”

Cedric’s eyebrows raised for a moment as he considered it. “That might be a good idea. What does it have to do with me?”

“I’d, er, kind of like you to run it.”

“What?” Diggory replied in shock as his eyes bulged out. “Why me?”

“For one thing, I found out from Professor Lupin that you’re one of the best in your year.” Harry paused before explaining, “He was a good friend of my parents.”

“Oh. That’s nice of him to say. What other reason?”

“You’re a Hufflepuff,” the Boy-Who-Lived answered simply. “The Slytherins hate Gryffindors and the Gryffindors hate the Slytherins. If a Ravenclaw led the group, everyone else would believe it would be nothing but theory and would expect to have to write essays about whatever gets covered.”

With a small chuckle, he said, "You're probably right."

"You should probably get a staff sponsor before Lockhart finds out. Otherwise, he'll probably try to take over the club and render it useless."

"You seem to have given this a lot of thought," the prefect replied pensively.

Harry smiled. "I have. I've also heard that Professor Flitwick was a dueling champion, so he might be a good suggestion for a staff sponsor, unless you have a better idea."

"Hm. Let me consider it for a few days. I'll let you know."

"Good enough," Harry replied, holding out his hand to shake Cedric's. He was sure that he'd convinced Diggory. "See you later," he said before opening the door and leaving.

--TM--

On Saturday, September 19th, Harry threw Hermione another birthday party, but this one wasn't a surprise. If you keep throwing someone surprise parties, they'll be expected soon, and no longer be a surprise. At the party, he gave her store credit for Flourish and Blotts, remembering to honor their agreement not to give each other romantic gifts until they officially started dating the next year.

A week later, Harry and Hermione were sitting at breakfast when the mail arrived. Hedwig was carrying two packages, which Harry knew were from the Grangers, since that's where his owl had been for the past few days since Hermione sent a letter to her parents. One package was very familiar and always brought a smile to the Boy-Who-Lived's face – his latest comic book. The other was a letter from the Grangers that said the Dursleys had signed Harry's emancipation papers, and they were being filed in the muggle world. With any luck, Dumbledore wouldn't find out about that until the summer – far too late to Oblivate people to stop it from happening. It would be in the computer system, which he didn't think Dumbledore knew how to access. Harry was reading the legalese when someone tapped him

on the shoulder. He turned to see Cedric Diggory standing behind him.

“Hi, Cedric.”

“Hi, Harry. I thought I’d let you know first. I talked to Professor Flitwick and he agreed to sponsor a Defense club, so we’ll be having our first meeting this Saturday.”

Harry grinned at the fifth year. “That’s great! I’m looking forward to it.”

--TM--

At the same time somewhere in London, a meeting was taking place in a muggle restaurant. Anybody who got near enough to hear the two people talking only heard a light buzzing sound. The man with black, greasy hair, wearing all black muggle clothes said, “Well...Shadow...your proposal is very intriguing. I just want to know that you’ll be able to do what you’ve promised. If you fail, I’ll be....”

Suddenly the man found himself under a unique curse. He felt fine if he was perfectly still, but if he moved at all, he would feel pain worse than the Cruciatus curse. However, the only indicators of his situation were the beads of sweat forming on his brow. He was very used to hiding his emotions.

“Now, Severus,” the Shadow replied softly. “I will do exactly what I said, and you will be rewarded for your...cooperation. By the time Dumbledore finds out about our little agreement, it will be too late for him.”

--TM--

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

I know that JKR apparently said Cedric would’ve been a 4th year at this time in an interview, but she also said Hermione’s middle name was Jane in an interview. Her interviews aren’t entirely reliable, so I take canon facts from the books. In the books, all we’re told is that

Cedric was 17 during the Triwizard Tournament. His being a 5th year prefect now works best for my story.

## Chapter Twenty-one – Lockhart Being a Pain

“How does that look now?” asked Hermione. She and Harry were in the process of redecorating the legendary Chamber of Secrets, and she’d just transfigured the statue of Salazar Slytherin’s head into Mrs. Pac-Man. Neither could stand looking at that ugly, crazy wizard. She was answered by loud laughter.

“Looks much better,” Harry said in between laughs. “You do realize what trouble we’ll be in for ruining this hysterical, er, historical monument if someone ever finds this place.”

“That’s highly unlikely. In the past thousand years, only you and Tom Riddle were able to open the passage and we are now the only people alive who know this location. Besides, I set it so a simple finite will change it back, and I’ll probably do that once we leave Hogwarts. Even if I do forget, the spell should wear out in ten years.”

The couple then changed all the snake statues into the Pac-Man ghosts and animated them so they were constantly switching places. They had decided to use the chamber as their private headquarters, and had spent a lot of time cleaning it up and putting shag carpeting on the stone floor.

Harry had felt like an idiot when Hermione suggested he try speaking Parseltongue as Tox. Since he’d always been a Parselmouth before they traveled back in time, he’d never thought of transforming in order to do that. After he’d tried and it worked, he’d commented on how much easier it would’ve been to obtain the ring Horcrux if he’d have done that. Consequently, he didn’t have to carry a thought sphere around to open the doors, but Hermione kept it with her so she could get there alone.

They’d added more light to the chamber and made it warmer and less damp than before. They also warded it against rodents and insects. They even added a full bathroom like they’d done to the cabin they’d lived in before they started meddling with time, along with an office and bedroom, just in case they had to hide down there for an extended period of time. In the office, they wrote down what little

information they had about the 'Shadow of Pain.' Mainly it was a list of crimes they suspected this person had committed.

--TM--

"Er, welcome everyone to the Practical Defense Club," announced Cedric nervously at the first meeting. They were in a large unused classroom in the Charms corridor of the third floor that Professor Flitwick, the staff sponsor, had recommended. In fact, the Head of Ravenclaw was present, leaning against the back wall. Harry and Hermione, who were standing near the front, were pleased to see nearly fifty students had shown up.

Diggory continued, "As you know, instruction in Defense Against the Dark Arts has been..."

"Uneven in the past," interrupted Gilderoy Lockhart, who'd just entered the room, clad in periwinkle blue robes that would've matched the gown Hermione wore to the Yule Ball perfectly. "Fortunately, with me now teaching the subject, instruction is at a much higher level." He grinned and posed for a moment, showcasing his perfect teeth. "However, I certainly understand the need for all of you to practice hard to get up to the level where your performance in my class will be satisfactory, considering the terrible teachers you were subjected to in the past. Although I must commend you for realizing this problem and working to solve it, Mr. Diggory, you should've come to me so that we could address this problem together."

Harry whispered in Hermione's ear, "Do you think that the crimes that idiot has committed warrant execution?"

"Possibly," she hissed back, "but not here."

In the meantime, Cedric answered the Defense professor in a complimentary tone that anyone with a brain could tell was sarcastic. In other words, Lockhart ate it up. "I realized how busy you must be and how fortunate that we are to have you teaching us at all. I didn't want to add extra burdens to you, so I asked Professor Flitwick to help me, since I knew he has been a dueling champion, and therefore

could help us almost as much as you. Certainly enough to get us to the level where our classes should be.”

“And I was only too happy to help,” added Flitwick, stepping forward. “However, since you’re here,” he added with a grin as he brandished his wand in a way that would later be reminiscent to Star Wars fans of Yoda brandishing his lightsaber, “we could treat the class to a demonstration duel between two experts.” The predatory look on his face showed that he was more than ready to mop the floor with Lockhart.

For a moment, a look of fear flashed across the fraud’s face as he swallowed. “No...I mean, as Mr. Diggory pointed out, I am rather busy.” He had begun backing up toward the door. “I, er, just wanted to commend Mr. Diggory for his efforts and...wish you luck. Five points to Hufflepuff. Good day.” He turned around and walked out the door as fast as he could, closing it behind him.

“As I was saying,” Cedric continued as though there had been no interruption, “Our defense lessons have been uneven. Lately, all we’ve been doing is listening to obviously...embellished tales praising Professor Lockhart instead of actually learning how to defend ourselves properly, and we are definitely not learning what we need to pass our O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s.”

“Are you saying that Professor Lockhart is lying?” asked a younger girl who appeared upset. She obviously had a crush on the fraud, like so many others.

“I don’t want to accuse anybody of anything,” replied the Hufflepuff, trying to keep the peace. “I just want to practice Defense Against the Dark Arts. The first spell I’d like to go over is...”

Having avoided a conflict, Cedric continued the lesson, proving to Harry and Hermione that they had made the right choice. Hermione did notice one problem, though. While Harry was practicing spells, he was completely oblivious to the fact that Cho Chang was checking him out with longing in her eyes. Another thing Hermione noticed was that Miss Chang was far more developed than she was in this young



body. Hermione had hoped the Asian girl would've kept her eyes on Mr. Diggory, but one can't have everything. Besides, Cho had seemed to like Harry before she showed interest in Cedric. The brunette couldn't wait until next year, when she could officially claim Harry as her boyfriend and tell all the other girls in Hogwarts to back off.

--TM--

"I'm sorry, Harry, but I really don't think it would be a good idea for Lockhart to drop dead at Hogwarts. It would get too much attention and would be investigated. Maybe during the holidays..." It was the next morning while the young couple was training in the Room of Requirement. They were discussing what to do about the joke that was currently occupying the Defense Against the Dark Arts position. They really missed Remus teaching them.

"How about if we Oblivate him?" asked Harry.

"No," replied Hermione, "that would...what if..." Harry grinned as he watched his partner in time getting an idea. She began to laugh.

"What?"

"I've got a brilliant idea of what to do to Lockhart!"

--TM--

It was a few days later that the young couple began implementing their plans against Lockhart. After dinner, he was walking toward his quarters when he heard footsteps close behind him. He stopped and turned around, seeing nothing in the hallway. He also noted that the footsteps had stopped. His eyes darted around for a minute, obviously not seeing the invisibility cloak, and he turned back around and continued on his way.

After saying his password (Gilderoy Lockhart has the most charming smile), he opened the door to his quarters and began to step into the room until they appeared – flaming red letters in midair – delivering a message that made him sweat.

You may have Obliviated our minds, but our souls still remember, and we will follow you until you confess what you've done.

In a moment, the letters vanished and the door shut behind him, making him jump. He stood there taking deep breaths for a few moments before calling out, "Elf!"

With a loud pop, a house elf appeared. "What can Goopty be doing for Master Locky?"

"Get me a glass of Firewhiskey."

--TM--

And so it went that every day, Harry and Hermione would do something to Lockhart from under Invisibility cloaks. They were pleased to see that he was beginning to show a bit of paranoia by the end of the month. During the Ravenclaw versus Hufflepuff Quidditch match, Lockhart was too busy looking around himself to enjoy the game, which Ravenclaw won. His classes actually became more bearable as he didn't make students act out his 'heroics,' instead talking about the spells mentioned in the assigned chapter. It was too bad the near-squib couldn't actually perform them for the class.

Cedric was continuing to lead the Practical Defense club with more success than even Harry and Hermione expected. She had even commented to her boyfriend that Cedric was, "almost as good a teacher as you."

"Oops, sorry," said Cho Chang after she'd 'accidentally' rubbed up against Harry on the way out, making sure he was very much aware of her assets.

"That's okay, Cho," he said nonchalantly, doing his best not to show any reaction. "Hermione and I were in your way." He then took his unofficial girlfriend's hand in his as he turned toward her and away from his first girlfriend of another life.

"She looks upset," Hermione whispered while watching Cho leave.

"I just wish she'd get together with Cedric already. Can't she see I'm in love?" he whispered back.

"You are making our agreement difficult to live with," she chided while grinning at him. "I nearly kissed you when you said that."

"Well," said Harry with a smirk, "You are thirteen."

"But you're still twelve," she sadly replied. "Let's go." She didn't dare tell him how close she'd come to caving in under the gaze of those piercing green eyes.

--TM--

The weeks passed quickly, and before they knew it, Harry and Hermione were sitting at the Halloween Feast. Thankfully, Harry had avoided getting invited to Sir Nicolas' Deathday party. Over the years, the Boy-Who-Lived had gotten mixed feelings about this particular holiday. While there were some good things associated with it, the fact was that his parents had died on this day. Not to mention the incidents that had happened at Hogwarts on his first four Halloweens there. He did remind himself that he had become friends with Hermione on that same holiday as well. In any case, his choices were to brood all day or enjoy the feast, along with the later plans for Lockhart.

Harry would've enjoyed invisibly haunting Lockhart during the feast, but Hermione had reminded him that Dumbledore could somehow see through his Invisibility Cloak and wouldn't appreciate him terrorizing a teacher. They knew the headmaster still hadn't forgiven Harry for making him act like a headmaster and firing someone who abused his authority.

After Harry had stuffed himself with enough treacle tart and other dessert items, he pulled out his latest comic and read while he and his secret girlfriend waited for 'Gilderoy the Great' to leave. He had just reached the climax of the story when Hermione whispered, "He just got up."

“Let’s go,” he said as he stood, folding up the comic and stuffing it in his pocket. They quickly made it to the entrance hall, up the stairs and to just outside Lockhart’s quarters where Harry threw his cloak over them both. He then put the time-turner around both their necks in preparation, and then waited about ten minutes because he was always changing his password. “Maybe he’s been walking slowly and looking around to make sure he’s not being followed.”

“Either that, or he was stopped by silly fan girls asking for autographs,” commented Hermione.

With a smirk, Harry commented, “Yes, he does have a lot of them. I seem to recall a bright young Gryffindor girl who drew hearts around all her Defense lessons on her schedule a long time ago.”

Although she was turning red, she declared, “That never happened.”

Before Harry could react, they saw the fraud arrive in the hallway. He declared, “Gilderoy Lockhart is devilishly handsome,” to open the door. Before he stepped inside, Harry pointed his wand behind Lockhart and performed a spell to make him pause and turn around, giving the young couple time to rush into the room before the Order of Merlin – third class recipient. Once they were inside, Harry turned the hourglass on their time-turner once.

After glancing around to make sure they were alone, the two time-meddlers began to cast the appropriate charms on various items in Lockhart’s quarters, with their extra wands of course so the spells couldn’t be traced back to them. Harry also freed a magical creature Lupin had taught him about in another life that he’d kept trapped in an extra compartment of his watch/trunk for just this occasion. Nothing inside the trunk can affect the outside of it while in watch form. They finished just before the door opened and rushed out a moment before the professor entered and closed the door. That’s when the fun began.

First, Lockhart heard an eerie melody playing and a female voice singing,

Memories, all alone in the moonlight...

Gilderoy moved all over the room trying to locate the source of the sound, but it seemed to be coming from everywhere. What he did find were more words in flames floating in mid-air, telling about how they would never leave him alone until he confessed everything.

When the song was concluded, the letters faded as well. He went into his bathroom to splash water on his face, only to find the man who'd really defeated the Yeti he'd written about. He was six feet five inches tall with a muscular build, wearing ragged robes. In his right hand was his wand and in his left, a machete.

"It's your fault I'm so poor I can't afford decent clothes. I was going to be rich when I collected my reward, but you..."

"It was only business!" Lockhart replied nervously as sweat was pouring down his forehead. "It wasn't anything personal!"

"My memories were personal to me!" the intruder growled as he took a swing at Gilderoy with his machete.

"NO!" Lockhart shouted as he moved backward, falling on the floor.

CRACK!!!

Suddenly, the Yeti slayer wasn't in the bathroom anymore. He'd been replaced by an attractive woman in her late twenties. She was wearing tight-fitting exercise clothes, with her long, blonde hair in a ponytail. She was also pointing a gun at him and had a look of pure hatred in her eyes. If Harry and Hermione had seen this Boggart, they'd have killed Lockhart.

"Did you think I couldn't hurt you back after what you did to me?" she growled. "I spent months trying to figure out how I went from a treadmill at a gym to naked and alone in a hotel room, but I found out." She moved the gun lower to point at his favorite body part. "Now, I'm going to kill you slowly, you..."

"NOOOO!"

CRACK!!!

The teacher didn't wait to find out what he was facing this time. Instead, he got up and bolted out the door of his bathroom and headed toward the door of his quarters, only to be confronted by literally everything in the room floating toward him. First, he was hit with a cushion from his sofa, which wasn't so bad, but then one of his own shoes kicked him in the face while the other kicked him in the crotch. He doubled over in pain before one of his many portraits slammed into his head, breaking the canvas. The end result was it appearing like he was wearing the frame as a necklace.

Despite his tremendous pain, he crawled toward the exit, getting spanked by each of his books along the way. He grabbed for the handle, only to find it wasn't there and he was trapped in the room. He began crying as he made his way to a corner and assumed the fetal position as his own extra robes began whipping him.

At precisely seven a.m., all of the items in his room moved back into their original position, except the portrait frame that still hung across his neck. Lockhart glanced around to see there was now a handle on his door again. He rushed toward it and wrenched the door open, running out of there, leaving his room open for anyone to visit.

An invisible Harry and Hermione rushed in to destroy all evidence of what they'd done. He collected the boggart while she began removing the enchantments. Once the dark creature was back in Harry's trunk, he began helping her. They left about a minute before anyone got back to this room, without even using the time-turner.

--TM--

While the evidence was being destroyed, a completely disheveled Gilderoy Lockhart with rips on his clothes, messy hair, a portrait frame around his neck and bloodshot eyes burst into the Great Hall during breakfast. Every eye was on him within moments.

"MONSTER! In my quarters!" he announced in his panic.

Dumbledore rose to take command of the situation. "Everyone, please remain calm. I, along with some of the teachers will investigate whatever creature has attacked Professor Lockhart, and the rest of the staff will secure you in this room until the crisis has passed.

The headmaster, McGonagall, Flitwick and Lockhart made their way to the area in question, and the doors sealed themselves. Harry and Hermione had taken a round-about route to the Great Hall, to avoid being caught by Dumbledore. When they arrived at the locked doors, Harry swore.

"Language!" chided Hermione. "Think. All we have to do is go back an hour and we'll have no trouble getting into the Hall."

Harry grinned at her. "Brilliant! It will even establish our alibi."

"Precisely."

--TM--

"I'm sorry, Gilderoy," said the headmaster in his grandfatherly tone, "but I'm afraid I can find no trace of whatever attacked you. Are you certain you did not dream this?"

"Do you think I broke this beautiful portrait over my own head?" he yelled back, while finally removing it from his neck. His whole face was red with fury or embarrassment. "Something attacked me!"

"What did it look like?" asked Minerva, trying to hide her amusement.

"First, in the bathroom, it looked like a...giant about to attack me with a sword." He was trying to change the story a bit so as not to reveal his past crimes. "Then, with a loud crack, it changed into a...a...some kind of seductress, possibly a Veela, that I ran from before she could seduce me."

"It sounds like you met a boggart," said Flitwick with a smirk. "Of course, if that had been the case, your legendary skills would've easily dealt with the situation."

“Of course it wasn’t a boggart!” the red-faced man shouted back. “It was much more dangerous than them. It was a foul, dark creature, worse than Dementors, the like of which has never been seen by anyone who survived to tell the tale, before me.” He was now standing a bit taller, showing pride in himself.

“Of course, Gilderoy,” said Dumbledore. “Then what happened?”

“When I left the room, all of my things attacked me, including that painting.”

Looking around the completely organized room, Minerva asked, “What exactly attacked you?”

“M-my clothes floated out of the closet and...and whipped me.” He now paused, seeing how unbelievable his story was, considering that everything was back in place. “The door handle also had disappeared.”

“It’s here, now,” said Flitwick.

“I KNOW! It kept up all night until suddenly, everything moved back to its original place and the door handle returned. I ran out to the Great Hall and found you.”

“You were fighting with your clothes all night?” asked Minerva.

Not long after that, students were released from the Great Hall and informed that the creature that attacked Professor Lockhart was gone.

--TM--

A week later, Harry, clad in his red Quidditch robes, found himself flying once more onto the Quidditch pitch.

“It’s Gryffindor versus Slytherin!” announced Lee Jordan to the assembled crowd, which cheered wildly. Harry searched the crowd for Hermione while the names were announced. He did notice, however, that Draco Malfoy was not a member of the Slytherin team,



and they did not have brand new Nimbus 2001s. He hadn't even thought of that consequence when he targeted Lucius, but was glad of this change in the timeline for the most part. However, now he would have to (as he did the previous year) face an opposing Seeker who'd actually earned his place on the team rather than the pathetic ferret who, truthfully, didn't know which end of a broom to sit on. He'd never forget the way Draco crashed and landed on his bum during his first match once upon a never.

Once the balls were released, he flew up to his usual position away from the action and began scanning for the Snitch while listening to Lee's commentary.

"It's Katie Bell with the Quaffle as she streaks across the pitch. Looks like Flint's about to tackle her. She passes it to the lovely Angelina Johnson, who still won't date me..."

"Jordan!" interrupted McGonagall, causing Harry to laugh as he looked around. He noticed that his opponent, Terrence Higgs, was actually looking for the Snitch instead of following him. It really would be a challenge. He moved toward the center of the pitch so he'd have a decent chance at the Snitch no matter where it appeared.

"Johnson scores! Wish I'd score..."

"JORDAN!" McGonagall's face was red.

"Sorry, Professor. The score is now 10 to nothing with Gryffindor in the lead. Flint gets the Quaffle. Ouch! That's gotta hurt! Flint was hit in the head by a Bludger sent by Fred or George Weasley – can't tell which. He drops the Quaffle straight into Alicia Spinnet's waiting hands. It looks like Flint's alright. Too, bad. Sometimes Bludgers to the head can..."

"Jordan!"

"Sorry, Professor. I'm sure we're all glad Flint's skull wasn't cracked like it should've been."

"Jord..."

“Spinnet is hit by a Bludger sent by Bole, and Flint’s got the Quaffle again. Hope he...wow! Johnson comes up from the side and grabs the Quaffle right out of his hands before he saw her. She is so talented and beautiful...”

“Jordan!”

At that moment, Harry noticed that both Slytherin Beaters were targeting Angelina, and each had a Bludger. She wouldn’t be able to dodge both, so he dove toward one.

“Potter is going into a dive! Has he seen the Snitch? Higgs has just started to follow him. Potter nearly hits Slytherin Beater Derrick who moves out of the way. Angelina avoids a Bludger sent by Bole. Potter pulls up. Angelina shoots the Quaffle right past Miles Bletchley. Potter was feinting to distract Derrick! Good job, Harry, Angelina!”

Harry was still grinning when he glanced at Higgs’ angry face and began to chuckle. When the opposing Seeker did a certain hand gesture, Harry laughed out loud. Terence following Harry had made sure Derrick couldn’t regain control in time to hit his Bludger at Johnson, so Potter had manipulated him into helping Gryffindor.

It wasn’t long before Slytherin realized yet again that they had no chance of winning the game fairly, so they started playing rough, finally scoring points. Naturally, Madam Hooch, who Harry suspected was a Slytherin herself, turned a blind eye to the cheating, even while it was announced by Lee.

“Flint, a Chaser, grabs a Beater’s bat from Bole and rams a Bludger into Wood. The Quaffle isn’t anywhere near him, the bloody cheat!”

“Jordan!”

“Sorry, Professor. Flint obviously got the Quaffle confused with a Beater’s bat. It could happen to anyone. Looks like Wood is barely hanging onto his broom. I can see blood coming from his forehead.”

Harry suddenly felt something move behind his head and ducked reflexively, barely avoiding the other Bludger. Yet again, the Slytherins assaulted someone who wasn't doing anything at the time.

"Why do I even play this game?" he wondered aloud as he thought of his many Quidditch injuries. As he finally glimpsed a bit of gold, he remembered. The Snitch was about 50 feet from him, but 40 feet from Higgs. If he tried to sneak closer, he'd run the risk of Terrence noticing and getting there first. If he tried a feint, he ran the same risk. His only chance was to push his Nimbus 2000 for all it was worth.

"Potter is shooting across the pitch as fast as he can. I think he's really seen the Snitch this time! Higgs looks around and starts speeding, too. I see it right between them. They're flying from opposite directions. Come on, Harry!"

The Boy-Who-Meddled-With-Time saw that he was headed straight toward his Slytherin counterpart, but couldn't do anything about it now. He had only one goal – catch the Snitch or die trying. He was closing fast. Ten feet away. Five feet. Harry reached out his hand and grabbed the Snitch out of the air just before Higgs' hand touched the top of Harry's. Potter moved so that he was flying upside-down right below Terrence.

"Potter's got the Snitch! That's incre...Ouch! That's gotta hurt!" announced Jordan as the two Seekers crashed. "Higgs' left foot banged into Potter's left shoulder! Now Harry's left arm is hanging down – probably dislocated, but he's staying on his broom, holding tight with his other arm and legs. Higgs fell forward on his broom and smacked his face on the front. Looks like a broken nose. He's flying like he's Cunjunded now, but he's in the air. Oh, Gryffindor wins 220 to 50. And Madam Pomfrey had better get to the pitch."

Harry was breathing hard as he tried to ignore the pain. His left shoulder was definitely dislocated. He righted himself and began to descend...until he caught sight of Gilderoy Lockhart in purple robes headed toward the middle of the field. Harry, gritting his teeth, shot back up, determined not to lose all the bones in his arm. A second later, he was really glad he had. He got to see the still dazed Terrence Higgs crash his broom into someone in the stands, but not

just anyone – Draco Malfoy. The broom handle hit him square in the chest, but not hard enough to break anything since Higgs wasn't moving that fast. Of course, Draco was loudly moaning about the pain.

"My chest is caved in! I'm dying thanks to you! You bloody idiot! You fly worse than a Mudblood! When my fath...mother hears about this...If I'd been Seeker I would've gotten the Snitch!"

Harry was laughing through his pain when he glanced down to see Lockhart headed toward the Slytherins, and that Poppy had arrived at the pitch, looking frustrated. He flew down right in front of her. "Hi, Madam Pomfrey."

"Hello, Mr. Potter. Why do they even allow this stupid game to be played," she muttered while pointing her wand at Harry's shoulder. "Dislocated. Hold still." She performed a silent spell that painfully and quickly corrected his shoulder while it glowed blue. "There. Don't do any heavy lifting for the next twenty-four hours and you'll be fine."

"Thanks," he said, only to be ignored as she rushed off toward the Slytherin stands.

"Harry Potter!" came a voice from behind him that he'd always recognize.

"Hermione, love," he said while turning around, still on his broom.

"Are you alright?"

"Good as new," he said while moving his left arm to demonstrate.

"Then get off that thing,"

"Yes, dear." He dismounted his broom, only then realizing that he was still holding the Snitch in his right hand. He stuffed it in his pocket without comment.

"Why did you insist on joining the team? Do you enjoy scaring me like that?" She lowered her voice. "How many times have you been injured during a game?"

"This technically was after..."

"You know what I mean, Harry."

Shrugging his 'good as new' shoulders, he replied, "I will think about it, especially next year when Ginny could join the team. I don't actually enjoy being injured."

"Do you really mean that?" she asked, gazing into his eyes. She seemed genuinely surprised he'd even consider giving up Quidditch. Truthfully, he'd never heard of any student quitting their house team once they got on, except for Higgs when Malfoy bought his spot, and that wasn't voluntarily.

"Yes, I do. I plan on having a girlfriend next year to occupy a lot of my time."

She blushed slightly before asking, "Anyone I know?"

"I think so. This rather attractive Gryffindor girl who does a lot of reading..."

Suddenly they heard an angry shout of, "EXPELLIARMUS!" coming from the direction of the Slytherin stands. They turned to see Madam Pomfrey pointing her wand at Gilderoy Lockhart while catching his wand with her other hand.

She was still shouting, "HOW DARE YOU TRY TO TREAT AN INJURY HERE!?! I'M THE ONE QUALIFIED TO DO THAT! Now, I'll have to re-grow all the bones in Mr. Higgs' foot."

Although they knew it was terrible, both Harry and Hermione burst out laughing as they saw Terrence's obviously boneless foot hanging from his broom. The shoe had slid off.

Harry managed to tell Hermione, "I am so glad I avoided Skele-grow this time." After a few seconds, he added, "Too bad it's not Draco," causing them to start laughing all over again.

--TM--

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

## The Time Meddlers

### Chapter Twenty-two – Lockhart's Confession

"It always amazes me how seriously everyone here takes Quidditch," commented Hermione. It was about a week after the game and Harry had just been congratulated yet again on catching the Snitch as they left the Great Hall.

"Being congratulated doesn't bother me. What I hate is how the people who don't even play are bragging to the Slytherins who don't play how we won," complained Harry.

"Honestly," agreed Hermione. "What do all but the seven Gryffindor players have to brag about? You caught the Snitch, not Cormac, yet I've seen him boasting to some Slytherins. Like he had something to do with it."

"But if we'd lost, I'll bet it wouldn't have been Cormac's fault."

"Of course not. They love to take the credit, but never the blame," said Hermione.

"Along with the House points that come with winning," added Harry. After a moment, he said, "I never thought of it before, but we get absolutely no benefit whatsoever for winning the House Cup."

"It's an honor," defended Hermione.

"That doesn't even get us a party, that's freely given to the students who didn't gain any points, that's even given to the ones who lose us the most points."

Lowering her voice a bit, Hermione added thoughtfully, "Yet in our first year, we were shunned for losing points..."

"That we'd earned – me in Quidditch and you in class."

"By people who'd never earned one House point," concluded Hermione.

“Furthermore,” said Harry, “all the points you had earned in class didn’t get people to be friendly to you.”

“They called me an insufferable know-it-all.”

“So what is the point of the House Cup system?” Harry asked. “Why does anyone care about it?”

After about thirty seconds of silence, Hermione replied, “So that the people who don’t earn points can brag to the other houses.”

“And to turn housemates against each other instead of uniting against the teachers. For example, when Snape was still here, he could’ve taken a thousand points from me for breathing...”

“...and all the Gryffindors would’ve shunned you – not Snape,” concluded Hermione.

“In other words,” said Harry, “Every aspect of the House system causes division among the students. You’re automatically against three-fourths of the school once you’re sorted, and then the house points put you against your own house mates.”

“I never thought about it before,” said Hermione pensively.

“Me, neither.” He gave the Fat Lady the password and they entered the Gryffindor common room. Once they sat down, Harry pulled his newest comic out of his pocket and began to read it while Hermione studied from a large book she’d previously checked out of the library.

--TM--

Harry and Hermione continued their torments of Lockhart, but he stubbornly wouldn’t admit that he was a fraud, so they decided to up the ante during the first week of December, deciding that if he didn’t confess by Christmas Break, they’d kill him. Although they did desire to end his life, they wanted him publicly exposed as a fraud, even more. That was something that never happened in the previous timeline. He was still getting fan mail in St. Mungo’s.



It was about two a.m., and Gilderoy Lockhart was asleep, when two visitors entered his quarters under disillusionment charms (they needed more freedom of movement than their cloaks provided). They silently made their way to his four-poster bed, where Harry pulled open one of the curtains and silently stupefied him. After all, they didn't want him to wake up until they were ready. It took them about fifteen minutes to get everything set up.

"Let the games begin," said Hermione evilly when they were ready.

"Enervate," thought Harry, grinning as he cast the spell silently at Gilderoy.

"Petrificus Totalus," thought Hermione, while pointing her wand at Lockhart's now conscious form.

With their voices modified by a spell, the two invisible time-meddlers screamed, "Gilderoy Lockhart," in unison, causing his eyes to open. They saw his look of panic when he realized he couldn't move.

Harry began in an ethereal voice, "We have warned you and warned you again, but you still haven't confessed your sins."

"The time of your judgment is at hand. Confess or face our true wrath," said Hermione in an equally eerie tone. "On your desk is a written confession," commanded Hermione. "Sign it once you are able to move again."

"If you do not confess by tomorrow, you will die!" they said together, pleased to see beads of sweat forming on Lockhart's brow. Harry flicked his wand, releasing a dozen magical creatures that immediately surrounded the fraud's bed. A shield spell kept them from actually touching him, but as they each took on the form of one of Lockhart's victims; they saw a wet spot form on his sheet.

Leaving Lockhart to deal with his predicament, the two snuck out of the room.

"I didn't know you could pee while in the body-bind," Harry commented with a laugh as they hurried back to Gryffindor Tower.

"I guess you can," Hermione replied.

"I'll say one thing. It was hard to find all those boggarts."

"And to design that cage for them," agreed Hermione. "But it'll be worth it."

"I hope so."

"We'll know in a couple hours whether he signs that form."

Harry grinned. "And we'll mail a copy to the Ministry, the Daily Prophet and the Quibbler."

--TM--

Professor Gilderoy Lockhart was not having a good night. It had been over an hour since he'd been woken up by those...invisible whatever's that warned him he'd be killed. As he was currently completely under their mercy, he had no doubt of their ability to act on their threat. However, his mind was otherwise occupied.

Every five minutes, another twelve of his victims would replace the current ones and begin threatening him with revenge for what he'd done to them. Currently, he was facing three angry wizards, five angry witches and four angry muggle women, all of them screaming at him for whatever he'd done to them. He realized that even Azkaban had to be better than this form of torture. Under threat of death or more torture, knowing that his career was over no matter what happened, he made his decision. Now, he only hoped he'd survive the night.

--TM--

"Well, it's six o'clock," announced Harry with a yawn. He and Hermione were in the Gryffindor common room, having just come down ten minutes before after getting a few hours of sleep. They'd

put up appropriate wards at the table they were sitting at so they wouldn't be noticed while they waited to see if Lockhart signed his confession with their four copies that would automatically update just like the old D.A. coins. At this moment, Lockhart's body-bind would wear off and the boggarts would be re-contained in the special cage Hermione had designed that was loosely based off the Ghostbusters' ghost traps that pulled the specters inside it, but it would respond to both immediate and timed wand commands. Of course, it was disillusioned in Lockhart's quarters and they'd make sure to retrieve it later that day.

They were staring at four different parchments that each had the same thing written on it, waiting for a signature to appear.

To whom it may concern:

I, Gilderoy Lockhart, am a complete fraud. Every brave deed that I ever claimed to do in my books was done by someone else that I memory charmed. That is actually one of the only types of magic I have mastered. Removing the bones from the foot of that Hogwarts Quidditch player last month was typical of my Spellwork, so I knew in advance that I'd probably cause him harm, yet performed the spell anyway. I will submit to Veritaserum questioning by the Ministry Department of Magical Law Enforcement and will identify all of my victims using whatever means are necessary, so that the memory charms I've performed can hopefully be reversed.

Sincerely,

"Look!" proclaimed Hermione excitedly. "He's signing it!"

Harry grinned as he watched the name Gilderoy Lockhart form on all four parchments, imagining how frantically he was signing the magically binding confession after last night. "Excellent! We'll just mail these off and get to our exercise."

--TM--

Harry was very impressed to see that the aurors arrived at Hogwarts during breakfast that morning. "I would've bet that they'd have taken

until tomorrow to respond to the letter,” he whispered to Hermione when Head Auror Kingsley Shacklebolt arrived with a few associates. The fraud had actually shown up for breakfast, looking tired but well-groomed, and watching the doors as well. When he saw the lawmen arrive, he rose from the table with a fake grin on his face and walked over to them without comment, obviously not wanting to endure the humiliation of being arrested in front of the whole school.

“Obviously Auror response time is improving with the new administration.”

--TM--

The next morning at breakfast, Dumbledore got up to make an announcement. Everyone immediately noticed and quieted down as he stepped up to the podium. “Good morning, everyone. I’m afraid I have some bad news, and thought I’d share it before the owls start arriving with multiple copies of the Daily Prophet for you. It seems that Professor Lockhart has certain legal obligations that have come up that will prevent him from continuing to teach Defense Against the Dark Arts here at Hogwarts. For the remaining two weeks of this term, your classes shall be substituted by whatever teachers are available at that time. Now, because there are several pieces of bacon calling to me, I am finished speaking. Enjoy your breakfast.” With that said, the ancient wizard abruptly walked back to his place at the head table and did indeed grab some bacon.

It was only a few minutes later, while Harry was helping himself to some eggs, that the owls did start flying in, many of them carrying fresh copies of the Daily Prophet. One even came to Hermione, who was, as usual, sitting next to Harry. Neville, who was sitting across from them, also got his copy. While most students were paying the owls for their newspaper, Hedwig flew to Harry with a parcel he’d ordered a few days before.

“What’s that?” asked his unofficial girlfriend as he stuffed the small package into his pocket.

Shaking his head, with a grin on his face, he replied, "Now, now, Hermione. You should know that December is not the time to ask people about mysterious packages."

While Harry gave Hedwig some bacon, Hermione's ears turned slightly pink at embarrassment of having not thought about Christmas presents yet. She'd been so used to Harry telling her everything he was up to that she didn't realize he might want temporary secrets from her. "Oh. Sorry. I didn't realize it was something for Christmas. Just remember nothing expensive for me." She figured that would be enough of a reminder of their agreement not to get 'romantic' gifts for each other until they started officially dating the next year.

"Don't worry, Hermione," he replied with a straight face. "The Hope Diamond wasn't that expensive and I'm sure you'll like it."

Slightly giggling at the thought, she replied, "Good. As long as it's nothing fancy."

"What's the Hope Diamond?" asked Neville.

While Hermione answered that question, Harry borrowed her newspaper and read the front cover.

--TM--

Gilderoy Lockhart Confesses to Being a Fraud!

By Anna Jesse

Yesterday, winner of the Order of Merlin – third class (as well as many other awards) Gilderoy Lockhart signed a confession that he did not perform any of the brave deeds he is famous for. In fact, instead of heroic acts, he has done heinous acts. For the deeds he wrote about in his books, he found others who'd done them and interviewed the brave souls to get all the information he could, and then Obliviated them, taking credit for what they'd done. However, that's just the tip of the iceberg.

When questioned by aurors under Veritaserum, he confessed to raping numerous muggle women and erasing their memories of the deed as well. One can only hope that he hasn't performed similar deeds at Hogwarts...

At about the same time Harry was reading that paragraph in surprise, someone else was reading it in amusement. The formerly abandoned warehouse was mainly filled with two sounds – laughter from the Shadow of Pain and the screams of a muggle woman being used in a ritual to increase the Shadow's magical core. When the screams died down a bit, the conversation that had been taking place resumed.

"At least Lockhart knows what muggles are for," commented the cloaked figure.

"Yes, indeed," replied Severus Snape with a slight grin. "It reminds me of my former days with the old Dark Lord." It was easy to see nostalgia in his eyes. "I used to so enjoy torturing, raping and killing the filthy muggles...before he killed Potter's mudblood wife. I'd asked him to bring her to me after killing her family, but he couldn't even do that one simple favor! I need to have my entertainment just like anyone else!" At that moment, the muggle screamed again as the pentagram she was lying in glowed once more.

As though commenting on the weather, the Shadow said, "It is too bad that silencing charms will ruin the ritual. The noise is a bit distracting. The figure reached for a cup of tea and drank it while Severus replied.

"I don't know. The screams are refreshing, and I did notice the filthy muggle's long red hair. She does remind me a bit of Lily."

"She should be alive for a few minutes after the ritual is complete, Severus. You may enjoy her then."

"Thank you. Now, regarding your next ritual, are you sure you don't want to use a muggle princess?"

"Absolutely not! I won't pollute myself with muggle filth for this ritual, even if it calls for a princess' blood. It's one thing to take their lives or

their energy, but quite another to actually drink their blood! The adopted daughter of the Minister of Magic will do! At least she's a pureblood." The mysterious figure took a deep breath. "I killed Cornelius for turning his back on me, and soon I'll have revenge on Amelia. Susan Bones will soon be introduced to the Shadow of Pain."

--TM--

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

P.S. In 2001 Rowling flashed a notebook during a BBC interview that showed her notes on the students in Harry Potter's year and Susan is noted as being a Half-blood in Hufflepuff House. This information cannot be considered canon, however, because the notes conflict in too many places with the stories as they were actually published (HPLEX . ORG)

For the purposes of this story, Susan is a pureblood.

## Chapter Twenty-Three – The Capture

Tox,

I thought I'd let you know that Minister Bones has posthumously pardoned Sirius Black. A small notification will be on the last page of the Daily Prophet and owls are being sent to his remaining relatives. Again, I'm sorry this couldn't have been done before his death, but at least history will know the truth about him.

Sincerely,

Head Auror Kingsley Shacklebolt

"I'm sorry, Sirius," said Harry after showing Padfoot the letter he'd received earlier. He'd used his time-turner as an alibi when he snuck from Hogwarts to his shop, The Troublemaker's Paradise. They were in the back room under a privacy spell that even Dobby, who worked there, couldn't penetrate. "If only I'd waited on freeing you..."

"Look Harry, I haven't seen or felt a Dementor for nearly a year, and I'm enjoying my new life as Terry Cochran."

"But..."

"And half the Wizarding world would still distrust me, figuring I bribed my way out like so many other Death Eaters." Padfoot grinned. "Besides, I get to help a new generation of troublemakers pull pranks at Hogwarts. What greater honor could I ask for?"

His remark was met with appropriate laughter, and Harry had to admit his godfather had a point. "That is true. Many people will always believe Sirius Black was the worst Death Eater that ever lived, and no decision by the Ministry will change that. This way, you don't have to prove you're not a murderer to everyone you meet."

"And with my name officially cleared, it won't live on in infamy forever." He then put a hand on his godson's shoulder and looked him in the eye. "Harry, you and Hermione did help me tremendously, and I am in your debt. Never doubt that."



--TM--

The next few weeks passed quickly, with Harry receiving the final comic from the subscription the Grangers had bought him the previous year. When Hermione mentioned that they'd be happy to renew it, he agreed that it would be a great Christmas present, yet again.

Christmas break finally arrived, so all the students going home for the holidays were on the Hogwarts Express. Harry, who like last year, was spending Christmas with the Grangers, was sharing a compartment with Hermione, Luna, Ginny and Neville. Although Hermione had put up a ward to stop Draco and his goons from visiting them, it seemed as though he'd learned his lesson, although truthfully, he hadn't been as aggressive since his father died.

"Are you sure your parents won't mind if we invite Terry to Christmas dinner?" asked Harry.

"Of course not. We'll simply explain to them what a good friend he is and that he has no one to spend the holiday with," replied Hermione.

"Who's Terry?" asked Neville.

"Terry Cochran. The owner of The Troublemaker's Paradise," replied Harry with a grin.

"You know him? Fred and George adore him! They're going to try to work there this summer. Sort of as apprentices."

Harry grinned. "We know. He mentioned them in a letter."

Hermione leaned forward conspiratorially. "Don't tell them this, but Terry's hoping to open a Hogsmeade branch when they graduate in a few years and having them run it."

"They'd love that!" declared Ginny excitedly.

"Terry Cochran has been their hero longer than they know," said Luna from behind the Quibbler she was reading. It took a lot of effort for Harry to school his features so he didn't reveal that he knew exactly what she meant. They'd been admiring the Marauders, including Padfoot, ever since their first year at Hogwarts. The only question was how Luna knew that. He made sure not to make eye contact with Hermione, as he realized she was probably thinking the same thing as him.

The Boy-Who-Lived glanced at Neville and Ginny, and was relieved to see they were confused by the statement, but had both decided not to comment on it.

--TM--

"Hello, Harry. It's good to see you again. You've grown at least an inch," said Mrs. Granger as she pulled her daughter's best friend into a hug. Hermione was currently hugging her dad.

"It's great to see you again, too, Marissa," he replied, using her first name as he'd been instructed. "You too, Adam," he added, looking at Hermione's father.

"How was term, Harry?" Mr. Granger replied while shaking his hand as his wife and daughter hugged.

"Alright. Thanks for letting me stay at your house again."

"Our pleasure," replied Marissa.

"Well," said Adam. "I guess we should get to the car. By the way, both of you have dental appointments tomorrow."

--TM--

The next few days went well, although neither Harry nor Hermione enjoyed their dental cleanings or having their braces adjusted. Neither of them had cavities, and Harry was highly complimented on how well he'd taken care of his teeth for the past year. The main reason he'd decided to have his teeth cared for the muggle way, as

opposed to asking Madam Pomfrey to do it, was to score points with Hermione's parents, and so far it seemed that was going rather well. Both Harry and Hermione had quickly done their homework, which was still four years beneath their mental level. Harry was looking forward to third year, where he could at least take a few classes he hadn't already gone through. It was at dinnertime the day after they left Hogwarts that the young couple decided to broach the subject of Sirius' (although he did not go by that name anymore) Christmas plans.

"Mum," said Hermione, "there's someone else we would like to invite to Christmas dinner."

"That's fine, dear. Who is it? One of your other classmates?"

"Actually," replied Harry, "It's an adult friend of ours. His name is Terry Cochran and he owns a joke shop in Diagon Alley."

Eyebrows raised at that explanation. "I'm surprised you'd be that close to him."

"We met last summer at his shop," said Harry, "and I've kept in contact with him."

"He's a muggle-born who moved here from Australia," added Hermione, "although he's been working on acquiring a British accent."

A look of concern came on Adam Granger's face. "I know you're somewhat of a celebrity in your world, Harry. Is it possible that he's just hoping that being associated with you will be good for his business?"

Harry hid his amusement at that thought, and was genuinely touched that the adult Grangers would be that concerned about him. "He hasn't advertised his friendship to me yet," he replied, "but you can meet him for yourself and see what you think of him if you let him come over."

"He doesn't have any family left," added Hermione. "His parents died a few years ago and he doesn't have any brothers or sisters."

“And he runs a joke shop?”

“The Troublemaker’s Paradise,” Harry said reverently.

“Tell me truthfully,” said Marissa. “Have you used any of his products at Hogwarts?”

“Could you pass me some more potatoes?” asked Harry, avoiding the question.

“Harry?” said Adam as he granted his guest’s request.

“Not that the teachers have noticed. I didn’t do it. Nobody saw me do it. You can’t prove anything.”

Both of the adults at the table, as well as Hermione, laughed at that statement. “Well, as long as you’re not getting caught...” said Adam until his wife cleared her throat. “I mean, you shouldn’t prank anyone. You’re there to learn, not laugh. I mean...”

“You mean you like the idea of Harry performing pranks but think I want you to deny it,” Marissa interrupted before looking at Harry. “Don’t hurt anybody, don’t get caught, and above all, don’t get our daughter in trouble.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“I suppose you can invite Mr. Cochran over for Christmas dinner so we can get to know him,” said Adam.

“Thanks.”

--TM--

“Argg! I can’t stand all this homework! Why can’t they let us enjoy Christmas Break?”

“I know what you mean, Susan,” replied Hannah Abbot. She and her best friend, Susan Bones, were at the Minister’s Mansion. Susan had

lived there with her aunt since she took office. Amelia Bones was busy at the Ministry, so the two girls were alone in the house, not counting the four aurors that were stationed outside – one on each side of the home.

Security had been upgraded since Fudge had been killed. For example, now there was no Floo system inside the house. It had been moved to a nearby small, separate building built for that purpose. The wards had never allowed anyone to Apparate or Portkey into the mansion, so Floo was the method of entry and exit that the aurors believed Fudge's killer had used. The only mystery was how the killer got Fudge's password to the Floo. Although no one knew whether he'd done it or not, he was supposed to change his password every month to something difficult to guess.

The two Hufflepuffs had decided to get their homework done as quickly as possible, so that's what they were working on. Currently, they were writing a Charms essay that had been assigned by Professor Flitwick.

At the same time, the Auror standing guard outside the back wall wasn't actually standing. He was sitting on a conjured padded chair reading the Daily Prophet. He'd had this same duty the day before and found it even more boring than parchmentwork. He, Mark Burke, had finished his training the previous summer, hence his lack of seniority that led to guard duty. He was rather short at five foot five, and had light brown hair and a goatee, although no one could currently see that since both he and his chair were disillusioned. However, his newspaper was not. Otherwise, he wouldn't have been able to read it. From a distance, he thought he heard something being muttered and looked up from his paper to see a green beam of light coming straight at him. That was the last thing he ever saw.

The disillusionment spell, along with the conjured chair, disappeared with Auror Burke's death, so he visibly fell to the ground with his DP covering his face.

Slight chuckling could be heard nearby from an invisible figure. "That's perfect, Severus. That shows exactly how he was caught off

guard. You did that man a huge favor. Imagine how much trouble he'd have to face at work if he'd only been stunned."

"Indeed, Shadow," the former Potions teacher, who was also invisible, replied. "If you will..."

Although Snape couldn't see his new master, he could hear the incantation *Aetas Abrogo Impedimentum*, which removed a six foot square of the back wall until the counter-spell was cast, leaving no evidence behind. Although he knew the incantation and wand movements for the spell, he could only make a hole two square feet. The Shadow had told him that it had taken more than one ritual to gain enough power to make the spell work well enough to use in this manner. This obscure spell not only removed physical obstacles, but any wards or magical shields. It had been in one of the first obscure books the Shadow had stolen, and was perfect for maintaining the illusion of being able to move through shadows to enter rooms with no entrance and leave no clues of how it had happened. In fact, despite Auror suspicions, this had actually been the Shadow's method of entering to kill Fudge.

The two invisible villains quickly entered the house and found themselves in an empty bedroom.

"We'll spread out," ordered the leader after restoring the wall. They wouldn't want the hole found. Besides, it only took a few seconds to make another hole. "When you find the girl, stun her. If anyone else is in the house, kill them."

--TM--

"Finished," declared Susan happily as she put down her quill.

Hannah replied, "I'll be done in a..."

At that moment, the door opened and the girls could see the outline of a disillusioned man. Without a sound, a red beam shot from the man's wand and hit the surprised niece of the Minister while her friend watched in horror.

“I have her, Shadow!” a voice young Miss Abbot would never forget from the short time he was her teacher shouted before saying the feared words, “Avada Kedavra!”

Hannah saw the green beam of light racing toward her and dropped off her chair to the floor. The spell went above her and hit a window, shattering it.

“What’s going on?” shouted a voice from outside the window. It was one of the remaining Auror guards.

“Help!” shouted Hannah at the top of her voice. She heard Snape swear before her best friend began to float toward him. “NO!” she screamed, but Susan was floating too fast and was already out of the room. Hannah ran out, seeing the body of her friend rounding a corner.

“Miss Abbot!” came a voice from her other side. She turned to see an Auror.

“He’s got Susan!” she shouted in her panic. “That way!”

She watched as that Auror, along with two more, ran in the direction she’d indicated, only to find out that no one was there. She distinctly heard one of the Wizarding police say that Mark Burke was dead outside.

“Tell us everything you can,” asked the female Auror in charge while the other two were searching the area.

“It was Professor Snape and someone else who he called ‘Shadow,’” she replied through her tears. She then told the rather short story of what had happened.

--TM--

Minister Bones’ Niece Kidnapped by Former Hogwarts Professor!

By Rita Skeeter

Yesterday, while Minister Bones was safely in her office, her niece, fourteen-year-old Sharon Bones, was kidnapped from the Minister's Mansion, where one of the guards was too engrossed in reading his copy of the Daily Prophet to notice that he was being murdered. Aurors must remember that my articles are far too interesting to read while on duty and should be saved for off hours, where they can be given full attention as they deserve.

The only witness to this crime was her best friend, Hannah Anderson, also fourteen. They were, ironically, working on their Potions homework when their former Potions Professor, Severus Snape, burst into the room, immediately hitting Miss Bones with the full body-bind. He then shot a Killing Curse at Miss Anderson, who leapt over it, before kicking Mr. Snape below the belt. The noise finally attracted the other Aurors that were supposed to be guarding the house, so they rushed in. Snape called out to a companion he called the Shadow before levitating Miss Bones right past the guards and leaving with this Shadow.

Headmaster Dumbledore, who has repeatedly gone on record as saying that he trusts Severus Snape, had this to say. "Obviously, Severus met up with Bellatrix Lestrage, who has decided to call herself 'Shadow' for reasons that are her own. He must have gone on that mission to make sure no one was hurt and purposely missed the Killing Curse he fired at Susan's friend. Apparently, Bellatrix is under the impression that poor Susan can help resurrect You-Know-Who." (We edited out the feared name that the Headmaster spoke).

When asked why the kidnapping was successful or if he'd known about it in advance, he looked at his pocket watch and claimed he was behind schedule. If Dumbledore is correct about the Shadow being the escaped prisoner, Bellatrix Lestrage, then she has now killed one Minister of Magic and kidnapped another Minister's niece, both from the Minister's Mansion.

Minister Bones had this to say.

"Whoever this Shadow is, along with Severus Snape, you have gone too far. Attacking any child is a cowardly act, but attacking my niece was the worst mistake of your life. There is no rock you can hide



under to escape me. I am going to find you, and when I do, you'll beg me to put you in Azkaban."

At the Granger house, Hermione couldn't help but cry as she read the story. Although she knew that Rita had made many mistakes, including names and ages of the girls involved, it didn't take much to figure out who was really kidnapped. After Harry read the paper he cursed and vowed that, "The next time I see Snape, I'll kill him." Fortunately, the adult Grangers hadn't heard him, but Hermione did. All she did was nod in agreement.

The next time they were inside Harry's trunk, they tried to figure out how they could get any leads on where the Shadow had Susan, but found that until they knew where Snape was, they had no clue. The only thing they knew for sure was that Snape was under a Fidelius Charm somewhere in England. They asked Sirius to keep his eyes and ears open for any information.

--TM--

Christmas Eve had gone very much as it had the previous year, including their visit to a church, but all Harry and Hermione could think of was Susan, wondering what was happening to her. Her parents had been told what was bothering them because it was too obvious, and were entirely sympathetic to how concerned they were for their classmate. However, they did make an effort to enjoy the holidays as much as possible.

This year, Winky wasn't surprised to get Christmas presents, although she was still very grateful for them. She once more baked a ton of dessert items for them to enjoy while opening the other presents. The Grangers did indeed renew Harry's subscription to The Amazing Spider-Man while Harry gave them a painting he'd found in a muggle art store. He gave Hermione a book he knew she didn't have, while she gave him a new Seeker's glove. They were still keeping to their commitment not to exchange special gifts until the next Christmas, when they would be officially dating. They were both looking forward to Terry Cochran's visit for dinner that evening.

--TM--

Harry and Hermione were both pleased when the doorbell rang. That was his first test to prove he was muggle-born, as they had both reminded the pureblood Sirius Black. Over the course of the past four months, he had been learning as much muggle 'common sense' as possible to maintain his cover.

"Hello," said Marissa as she opened the door. "You must be Mr. Cochran."

"Yes, Mrs. Granger, that's me. I insist you call me Terry," he replied, shaking her hand with his right. In his left hand was a bottle of wine. "And thank you for allowing me here. Happy Christmas."

"Happy Christmas, Terry. And I insist you call us Marissa and Adam," said Mr. Granger from behind his wife. They led him inside and offered to take his coat. When he removed it, it was revealed that he was dressed in a nice suit. After Marissa commented he'd arrived right on time, they all went to the dining room where Christmas dinner was served.

"The kids tell me you own a joke shop," said Adam while they were eating.

"Yeah. It's a lot of fun. They told me you're a dentist."

The small talk continued for a few minutes until Adam finally asked, "I do wonder how you got so close to the kids when they're in school."

They'd rehearsed the story that Sirius told them. "Well, what can I say? I met Harry right after I opened up the shop and we immediately hit it off. He introduced me to Hermione, too. When he's ordered supplies from my shop, about once or twice a month I believe, he'd include a note and I've also written to him while filling those orders. Anyway, I mentioned in passing that I'd be alone for Christmas and was truly surprised to get an invitation here. I honestly wasn't trying to get him to invite me, although I'm very happy to be here. May I say that the turkey is excellent, Marissa."

“Thank you,” she replied. The conversation went well from that point on. The Grangers couldn’t find anything to fault him with and promised to visit his shop later in the week.

--TM--

At the same time, the Shadow had finished eating Christmas dinner and looked at the crying girl inside a small cell.

“Quit your crying, girl! I did heal you, after all. You should be happy that you’re going to live for now. I have many more rituals I need you for.”

“My aunt told me you were horrible, but not this horrible...”

“Nullus Spiritus!” the Shadow shouted to avoid hearing the long-abandoned name the villain had once gone by. With one hand, the Shadow held Susan was under the horrible curse, which stopped her from breathing, and with the other hand picked up a glass with a red liquid in it. At first glance, one might believe it was wine, but it was easy to tell at a second glance that it was obviously blood – Susan Bones’ blood. The Shadow drank the crimson liquid down as Susan’s arms moved about in desperation. Susan’s face was turning blue before the Shadow set the glass down and released the curse. While the victim was gasping for breath, her tormentor commented, “Didn’t I tell you to call me the Shadow of Pain?”

--TM--

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

## Chapter Twenty-Four – In Search of Susan Bones

### Potion Supplier Wanted

The Troublemaker's Paradise joke shop requires the services of a Potions master for an extremely lucrative arrangement, whereby all present and future potions-based products will be manufactured and improved upon by the Potions master, which will allow the owner more time to manufacture and design other products in this time of expansion. The owner is willing to pay top Galleon for the services of a qualified individual. Interested parties may walk in for an interview during business hours.

After much discussion, it was decided that Terry Cochran would run this Daily Prophet ad in an attempt to lure Severus Snape to his shop, in hopes of tracking him to wherever Susan Bones was being held prisoner. Although Harry, Hermione and 'Terry' were well aware that Minister Bones had issued a warrant for Snape's arrest, they were hoping that money would lure him out of hiding. If it didn't work, they'd only wasted a few Sickles for the advertisement anyway.

At the same time that ad was being delivered as part of the newspaper, Harry and Hermione were inside a muggle McDonalds (Polyjuiced as adults) sitting at a table waiting for Kingsley Shacklebolt. After finding nothing at the Bones' residence after they'd snuck there to investigate Susan's disappearance, the time-meddlers decided to see if the aurors had found anything that wasn't being reported. Harry had a stack of hotcakes drowning in syrup in front of him while Hermione was nibbling on a breakfast sandwich when they noticed the bald man enter the room. Harry got up and walked toward him.

"Hello, Shack. Don't look so serious?" That was their agreed-on password was a reference to the case of Sirius Black, wherein they'd met.

The Head Auror turned to see a tall, blond man with blue eyes, dressed in casual muggle clothes. He blinked. "Hello, er, Tox?" When Harry nodded, Shacklebolt continued. "You're taller than I remember and dressed differently."

Shaking his head in disappointment, the Boy-Who-Lived replied, "Surely a man like you knows that looks can be deceiving. We have a reason for secrecy. Order your breakfast and then join us. Thanks again for meeting with us." Harry returned to his seat with Hermione.

"We met once, but I didn't give you my name," said the only female occupant of the table. "You may call me Sky."

"So, what is it you wanted to talk about?"

"Very direct, Mr. Shacklebolt," said Tox. "To put it simply, we're going to attempt to find and rescue Susan Bones, and wanted to find out if there's any information about her kidnapping you could share."

His eyes widened as he appeared shocked. "Well, that's a generous offer, but half the aurors are..."

"...bound by the laws of the Ministry," interrupted Sky. "Surely you could see the advantage that people operating outside of those guidelines have over aurors."

Tox added, "Surely the priority is getting Miss Bones back safely. Not who gets the credit."

"Which we don't want, anyway."

The bald man scratched his chin as he thought it over. "Yes, rescuing the Minister's niece is our top priority, and if you can locate and free her, that would be appreciated." He sighed. "Unfortunately, we don't have a lot of information, but I'll tell you what we know."

--TM--

About three hours after their meeting with Kingsley Shacklebolt ended Harry and Hermione were on the Hogwarts Express heading back to school. The Head Auror hadn't had much information to share, but that in itself told them one thing. This Shadow character was thorough. Neville, Ginny and Luna were sharing the compartment

with them while Harry thought back to the conversation he'd had with his girlfriend after that meeting.

"I wouldn't be surprised if Susan is being held under the Fidelius Charm," commented Harry.

"I'd be surprised if she's not, which leads to the question of how to find out who the Secret-Keeper is and get that person to tell us the secret." She took a deep breath. "I doubt it would be Snape, but he might know who it is, probably the Shadow. In that case, we'll have to find a way to capture the Shadow."

"What if we simply followed Snape there?"

"It wouldn't work, Harry. We wouldn't see..."

"What if someone was holding onto Snape when he entered the building?" interrupted Harry.

Looking as though she were lecturing a five-year-old, Hermione replied, "In the cases where someone has managed to enter a Fidelius-protected house without knowing the secret, the person is unable to see or hear anything, as though blind and deaf. Some reported brief flashes of sight and sound every few minutes, but not enough to accomplish any task inside the protected house. That person would be helpless to defend themselves against any occupant of the house who wished them harm."

"So you're saying it's a bad idea?" questioned Harry. His girlfriend didn't dignify that with an answer beyond rolling her eyes.

His thoughts returned to the present when the snack trolley showed up outside his compartment and they were offered to buy treats. After the kids made their purchases and the snack lady was gone, Ginny asked, "Before she got here, you seemed to space out for a few minutes. What were you thinking about?"

Harry saw she and Neville were looking at him curiously while Hermione looked concerned. Luna, as usual, had her face hidden behind an issue of the Quibbler.

"Truthfully, I was thinking about poor Susan Bones, wondering what's happening to her."

"That was terrible to read about, even if Rita Skeeter couldn't make up her mind about Susan's name," commented Neville.

"That's so scary to think about," said Ginny.

"I'm sure the Nargles will keep her alive until the snake saves her from the darkness," declared Luna without looking up from her magazine.

"I hope so," Harry agreed, thinking of his Animagus form.

--TM--

That night at dinner, Dumbledore made no mention of the tragic kidnapping of Susan Bones, and Harry knew exactly why.

"It's because he's still defending Snape!" he exclaimed once he was alone with Hermione. They'd snuck into the Chamber of Secrets so they could discuss the situation more freely. Harry still enjoyed looking at the images from the Pac Man game that had replaced the snake decorations Slytherin had put there originally, but right now, even they couldn't amuse him.

"Of course he is, Harry! We knew he would. Snape could Crucio me on the head table during dinner and he'd still say, 'I trust Severus.' In fact, we're counting on it."

Taking a deep breath, he replied, "I know. We even read it in the paper, but to have him totally ignore the fact that Susan was kidnapped by a former professor that he'd defended for years...he's probably still mad at me for getting Snape sacked."

Hermione looked thoughtful for a moment. "I just wish we knew why Dumbledore trusts Snape. Did he have proof that he had turned away from evil..."

"Which I doubt."

"...or just that he hated Voldemort?" she finished after glaring at Harry for interrupting her.

"That's got to be it!" declared Harry. "It makes perfect sense! Anyone watching Snape for five minutes would realize he hadn't become a good guy, especially around me. But if he simply hated Voldemort for some reason it would force him to work with Dumbledore."

"And whatever problem he has with Voldemort wouldn't necessarily apply to the Shadow," added Hermione. "Especially if it was a personal reason. Maybe Voldemort killed someone Snape cared about and he wanted revenge."

"Or he got sick of the way Tom tortures his followers more than his enemies," suggested Harry.

"It could be anything," admitted Hermione, "but the point is that if Snape only had a personal grudge against Riddle then he'd have no such problem with the Shadow."

"But Dumbledore is too naïve to even consider that possibility," Harry huffed. "He always wants to believe the best of people, despite stacks of evidence against him."

"And that is his biggest weakness," concluded Hermione. "While that attitude might work for a religious leader trying to help someone change their ways, it is certainly inappropriate for a man with Dumbledore's positions. I mean, in the muggle world, no one with Snape's record would ever get a position as teacher in a public school. Even if muggle teachers aren't perfect, and some are even mean, none of them are known murderers, and even the meanest can't get away with blatantly bad behavior like Snape did."

Harry nodded. "They'd at least have to hide their favoritism and not publicly advertise it."



“And that’s saying nothing about what damage Dumbledore’s attitude has been doing in his position on the Wizengamot all these years. How many guilty people has he let go unpunished.”

“He does care a lot more for the criminals than the victims,” agreed Harry, thinking about how he knowingly let Malfoy walk around the school for a year with a Dark Mark, nearly killing both Katie Bell and Ron Weasley, Imperius’ing Rosmerta, eventually leading Death Eaters into the school, all because he wanted to ‘turn Draco from the path of darkness.’

“And everyone completely trusts his flawed judgment.”

--TM--

The next day, Dumbledore, as Harry, Hermione and Sirius knew he would, proved that he was still on Snape’s side as he walked into the Diagon Alley shop known as The Troublemaker’s Paradise, just as Terry Cochran, aka Sirius Black, was closing the door. He immediately reinforced his Occlumency shields when he noticed the visitor to his shop.

“May I help you?” he asked the man with purple robes, a pointy hat and a long white beard walked up to him. He kept in mind that he should not know the man’s identity.

“Good day to you, sir,” Albus replied with a twinkle in his eyes. “Are you by any chance the owner?”

“Yes, sir. Terry Cochran at your service. Whatever pranking needs you have, I’m sure I’ve got just the thing for you. However, we are just closing so...”

“Although your products are quite intriguing, I’m here on another matter. It’s regarding your advertisement for a Potions master.”

“Oh, yes. Are you interested in applying? Then come on in. Let me get you an application, Mr...”

The Headmaster's eyes widened slightly at not being recognized. "Dumbledore, Albus Dumbledore. I don't believe you attended Hogwarts, but perhaps you've heard of me."

"Oh, yes," Sirius replied as he closed the door behind them, "I have heard of you. You're the headmaster of at that school. Now that you mentioned your name, I believe I've seen your chocolate frog card."

"Yes. Delightful sweets if I do say so myself. I'm not here because I personally desire the job you advertised; rather I'm representing someone else."

"Oh. If it's one of your students, I'm afraid I need a more experienced..."

"No, Mr. Cochran. The man I'm representing is a quite experienced Potions master. He even taught Potions at Hogwarts before he began brewing them independently to sell to many businesses."

Terry grinned broadly, pretending that he had no idea who Albus was talking about. "Sounds promising. Send him over and I'll be glad to interview him."

"It may be difficult for him to come here personally, but I can vouch for the quality of his work."

"While I don't doubt your word, Headmaster Dumbledore, I do insist that I personally interview anyone who I hire. You can tell him that it will be well worth his time. This business is really growing, so there's plenty of profit available for the right people. You tell him to be here at 7 p.m. on Friday and I'll interview him. I will have him brew something during the meeting, so tell him to be prepared for that. If he's as good as you say he is then we'll come to an agreement that's profitable to both of us."

"I shall relay the message," said Dumbledore merrily before walking outside. Sirius locked up the shop and immediately contacted his godson.

--TM--

On Friday night, everyone was ready for the plan. Terry Cochran was inside his shop while Harry and Hermione, under invisibility cloaks, were nearby. They'd thought of putting listening charms or devices inside the joke shop, but Sirius believed Snape would find them. He was bound to be very careful since he was wanted by the law.

Harry tensed when he saw their target Apparate just outside the shop. "Remember the plan," hissed Hermione.

"I know," he whispered back.

Severus knocked on the door, which opened at once. Right after Snape entered and the door closed, the young couple moved much closer to the door and waited, drinking Polyjuice about an hour after the door closed, according to the plan.

--TM--

"You must be the Potions master Professor Dumbledore mentioned," said Terry with a grin.

"Yes, Mr. Cochran. My name is Severus Snape." The fugitive had his hand on his wand, ready to Obliviate the shopkeeper if necessary.

"Haven't I read your name in the Daily Prophet recently?" he asked. "Oh yes. That article that couldn't decide if Susan or Sharon Bones was kidnapped. I'd imagine they got the kidnapper's name wrong, too. Am I right?"

"Yes," agreed Severus. "The inaccurate reporting of that so-called newspaper is quite annoying."

"No doubt. Anyway, why don't you tell me about your brewing experience before I have you prepare some Pepper-Up Potion?" They talked for a bit, with Sirius continuing to pretend to like Snape, who brewed an absolutely perfect batch of the requested potion. They then haggled on prices and Terry promised to owl him an order, along with instructions for his products, in the next week.

--TM--

The door swung open about seventy minutes after it had closed, and Harry immediately hissed, "Imperio!" He'd already been aiming his wand. The unforgivable curse hit Snape, who tried fighting it but the Boy-Who-Meddled-With-Time was using his custom wand, which was quite powerful.

'Make a portkey to take us just outside the building where Susan Bones is being held!' Harry silently commanded the former head of Slytherin. He did as commanded, and the three partners were able to grab the piece of parchment Severus had used in time to feel the familiar tug behind their navels.

Harry fell on his rear when he landed, losing his concentration long enough for the glazed look to leave Snape's eyes. Without a word, he started running toward a building the others couldn't see. Harry jumped to his feet and raced toward his long-time foe, jumping on him just as Severus opened the invisible door and they both fell in.

--TM--

Harry felt just as disoriented as books on the Fidelius Charm had warned. He was in complete darkness and silence, but he could still feel Snape, so he punched him in the face before pulling his wand back out and Imperius'ing the Potions master to free Susan Bones. Harry kept holding Snape's arm and walking, hoping that he really was controlling his nemesis. After five minutes, they stopped moving.

For a full second, Harry could see and hear what was going on. He saw Snape open a cage door where he saw Susan, looking terrible, lying on the floor staring at them. He heard a somehow familiar voice call out from behind him, "What are you doing, Severus? Crucio!" Harry immediately realized the curse wasn't aimed at Snape, but himself, as he began to writhe on the floor in pain. Pulling his Occlumency up all the way – not to stop the pain but to keep his wits about him – he tightened his grip on his wand and pointed it in the direction the curse was hitting him from.

“Reducto!” he shouted. Under the darkness of the Fidelius Charm, he couldn’t tell if he’d hit his target or not, but the pain stopped. He felt a foot kick him in the face and grabbed it with his free arm, tripping Snape before he felt a smaller hand touch his shoulder and weakly pull him. He hoped it was Susan and got up, saying, “You’ll have to guide me to the door because I can’t see anything.”

He then pointed his wand where he thought Snape was and started firing, “Stupefy,” knowing that if he hit anywhere on his attacker, he’d be down for the count. He continued moving his wand around firing that hex blindly (providing cover fire) while being slowly led by Susan, until he felt her guide his hand and hold it in place. Taking the hint, he fired another, “Stupefy!” While he’d have rather used a Reducto, he knew it wouldn’t put anyone out of commission unless it hit the head or chest, which couldn’t be guaranteed. Susan then moved his hand to another direction, so he did the same. Finally, Susan let go of his wand hand and weakly dragged his arm, which led Harry to believe that he’d hit the target.

Finally, after what seemed like forever, a door was opened and he could see and hear again. He saw his girlfriend, in an older female body, looking both concerned and angry at the same time. She was about to start screaming at him before he noticed her eyes resting on the person he’d rescued. He knew he’d still get an earful from Hermione later, but right now she was more concerned with the immediate crisis.

“Susan!” Hermione called as she came forward. “We need to get you to Saint Mungo’s.”

At that moment, Harry swore as he felt his Polyjuice potion wear off. Instead of looking like a grown man, he was back to being himself.

“Harry?” Susan asked in surprise while Harry got his first good look at her. Her clothes were torn and she was filthy. Her skin was pale and she was obviously malnourished. She also had a scar above her left eye where a knife had obviously cut her. There were more assorted scars he could see on her, but that one was the worst.

"Please don't tell anyone," he asked before pulling a flask out of his pocket and drinking from it, reverting to his previous form.

"If...if you say so. Thank you." She looked at the girl. "Are you Hermione?"

"Yes, but..."

"Are you Neville?"

"No," said Sirius. "I'm an adult friend of there's. Only say that Tox and Sky rescued you. Don't mention me at all."

"Neville knows nothing of this," said Hermione while Sirius made a portkey to the Wizarding hospital, "and please don't tell anyone." She sighed while Susan nodded. "We're secretly trying to stop the Shadow, but right now, we don't even know who he is."

With a half-grin, the weary victim said, "I know who the Shadow is. The Shadow's real name is..."

--TM--

Please review. Thank you to those who have. Sorry I took so long to complete this chapter, but real life can be time-consuming. It makes me wish I had a time-turner.

## Chapter Twenty-Five – Courtesy of the Shadow

“...The Shadow’s real name is...”

“...Dolores Umbridge,” said Susan, causing her rescuers to gasp.

“What?” exclaimed Harry.

“She used to be Senor Undersecretary to Fudge,” replied the weary girl, “until she got drunk and wrecked something in the Department of Mysteries. My aunt told me Fudge was appalled and wouldn’t even let her explain what had happened at her mock-trial.”

“Your aunt was there?” asked Hermione.

“Yeah. I think Umbridge’s time in prison made her even crazier than she was before...”

“The portkey’s ready,” interrupted Sirius/Terry. “It’ll leave in five seconds, and we don’t want to linger here anyway.”

He handed a quill to Susan. “This will take you to the lobby of Saint Mungo’s. Unfortunately, we can’t come with you. Get well.”

“Thanks,” replied Susan before she disappeared.

“Let’s get out of here,” said Hermione, prompting all three of them to Apparate, but not before they got a glimpse of the Shadow of Pain leaving the Fidelius-protected house. She was thinner and paler than before – her skin looked almost white – and was wearing blood-red robes, but there was no denying her identity. The trio disappeared with a loud pop.

--TM--

“It’s my fault!” screamed Harry before punching the wall in the Chamber of Secrets. He’d been in a daze since he heard the Shadow’s name and hardly remembered getting back to Hogwarts. He certainly didn’t notice Hermione assuring Sirius that she’d calm him down. He was in such a state that he didn’t even notice the

damage he was doing to his right hand. Hermione knew she had to stop him before he did damage she couldn't fix.

"IT IS NOT YOUR FAULT!" she shouted at him. "Now, stop before you hurt yourself worse!" She grabbed his hand, making him aware of his injuries.

"Ow! It is too my fault," he argued while she fixed his broken and bloody hand. "And you can say anything you want but the fact is that I did not have to set Umbridge up to go to Azkaban! I should've waited for you to return before..."

"We needed the Time-Turner before school began, so you were right to go on that mission." She sighed. "I laughed just as hard as anyone when I saw her picture in the paper from when she was arrested. There was no way to know..."

"I just had to have my revenge, didn't I? I should've known what the Dementors would do to someone like her. She was practically insane already. They drove her over the edge."

"She must've gotten out of prison just before we broke Sirius out," commented Hermione, realizing that nothing she said would absolve Harry of his guilty feelings right now.

"And immediately stole all the dark books she could find," added Harry, "and made herself powerful, so she couldn't go back to Azkaban. It's all my fault!"

Hermione sighed, realizing this was going to be a long night.

--TM--

Minister's Niece Rescued! Identity of the 'Shadow' Revealed!

By Anna Jesse

It would appear that Minister Bones has more support than just the aurors, because two private citizens that go by the aliases Tox and Sky managed to find and rescue Susan Bones. According to Head



Auror Kingsley Shacklebolt, the duo has previously captured at least one Death Eater and turned him or her over to the Ministry, but Mr. Shacklebolt wouldn't reveal the identity of that criminal.

Susan Bones, age twelve, was portkeyed into Saint Mungo's last night around eight p.m., suffering from malnutrition, as well as several cuts which she revealed came from rituals that her captors, the Shadow of Pain and her assistant, Severus Snape, forced her participation in. The Healers expect her to make a full recovery from her ordeal. When asked by aurors, she revealed that she knew exactly who her captor, the Shadow, was: Former Senior Undersecretary to Former Minister Cornelius Fudge – Dolores Umbridge.

About a year and a half ago, Umbridge was arrested at the Ministry for...

Hermione and Harry read the article as they sat at the Gryffindor table the morning after the rescue. The Boy-Who-Lived glanced toward Susan's best friend Hannah Abbot at the Hufflepuff table and saw her happier than she'd been since before Christmas. Yet again, the Headmaster made no mention of Susan Bones or Severus Snape.

--TM--

Terry Cochran, aka Sirius Black, did actually contact Snape with a list of potions-based products for him to manufacture, in an effort to hide his participation in the rescue of Susan Bones. However, he received no response whatsoever. Whether Snape knew he'd been part of the setup or just knew that someone knew he'd been there was unclear, but obviously the potions master was taking no chances. Sirius half-expected Dumbledore to show up and express disappointment in him for tricking Snape like that, but it never happened.

Time moved quickly, and soon it had been a few weeks since the rescue, and Susan Bones arrived at Hogwarts looking healthy, although if you looked in her eyes, you could see she was no longer an innocent little girl. She had a noticeable scar on her forehead (but it was not shaped like a lightning bolt) above her left eye, along with about ten others that were hidden by her Hogwarts robe. Auror

guards had escorted her into the building, but separated from her as she entered the Great Hall to join her classmates for breakfast. She'd only taken a few steps before Hannah Abbot practically jumped from the Hufflepuff table and ran to hug her best mate.

Harry didn't know who started it, but soon most of the Great Hall was applauding the Minister's niece, who had suffered so much, and he found himself joining in. After about a minute of that, Dumbledore walked up to his podium and proclaimed with a twinkle in his eye, "Welcome back, Miss Bones. As you can see, all of Hogwarts is overjoyed to have you among us once more. Please join us for breakfast. The pancakes are delightful."

Hermione turned to Harry. "Obviously, Dumbledore had to acknowledge Susan's presence, but still managed to say nothing about her ordeal or Snape's part in it."

"I noticed that, too. He simply won't admit, even to himself, that he was wrong about Snape turning good."

Neville, who'd been sitting with them, commented, "You're right. I never thought about it, but Dumbledore had that Death Eater her for over ten years, protecting him while he picked on students like me and still won't admit that was wrong."

"I think Minister Bones is getting sick of that, too," commented Hermione. "It looks like those aurors want to talk to him." Harry glanced toward the head table and noticed that the aurors who'd escorted Susan were now approaching the headmaster, no doubt to question him yet again on Snape's whereabouts.

--TM--

The next time the time-meddlers saw Susan was in Herbology, where they did some work with the adolescent mandrakes that had been at Hogwarts since September. Susan smiled at them quickly, but that was the extent of their communication until that Saturday, when Hermione was in the library alone.

“Hello, Hermione,” said Susan when she walked up to the table the Gryffindor genius was sitting at.

Nervously, she replied, “Hi, Susan.”

“Can we talk somewhere a bit more...private? And could you get Harry?”

“Of course. Come with me.”

She led the Hufflepuff girl to an empty classroom on the seventh floor of Hogwarts and asked her to wait a few minutes while she went into the Gryffindor common room to retrieve the Boy-Who-Lived. Once they returned, the couple remained silent as they cast multiple privacy charms to ensure the meeting wouldn't be overheard. Realizing what they were doing, Susan remained quiet as well.

Finally, Harry broke the silence. “Hi, Susan. How are you feeling?” he asked in concern.

“The doctors say I'm in perfect health,” she replied. “I just wish people would stop looking at my scars.” She sighed and glanced at Harry's forehead. “I guess you know what that's like.”

He nodded. “Hermione tells me you wanted to talk to us.”

After taking a deep breath, the redhead told them that, “First of all, I wanted to thank you ag...”

“That's not necessary,” interrupted Hermione.

“It's necessary for me,” she replied. “Also, as I'm sure you read in the newspapers, I told them what you told me to.”

“Yes,” responded Harry with a grin. “Thanks.”

“You're welcome.”

“And what's the real reason for wanting to see us?” asked Hermione.

The girl's expression turned hard, and it was easy to see how she'd survived her captivity. "I want to help you fight Umbridge and Snape." The young Ms. Bones wished she'd brought a camera to capture the shocked expressions on her heroes' faces.

"No," said Harry when he found his voice. "It's too dangerous..."

"but not too dangerous for you?" Susan shot back.

"You haven't been trained..." argued Hermione.

"I can learn!" She looked each of them in the eyes in turn. "I'm too young to join the aurors. This is my only chance."

"For revenge?" asked Hermione. "Because if that's it I'm..."

Taking a deep breath, the redhead admitted, "Revenge is part of it, yes, but it's more than that. I've seen first hand how evil they are. They make You-Know-Who..."

"Voldemort!" interrupted Harry. "He couldn't beat a baby and people still fear saying his name! If you're too scared to say the name of a dead..."

"VOLDEMORT! Alright? Voldemort! Does that make you happy?"

Harry grinned slightly. "A bit." He stared into her eyes and found determination – the same determination that had led him into so many adventures. The same unwavering determination that made Hermione follow him to Hell and back. He looked at Hermione. "She's serious about this." He sighed. "What do you think?"

Hermione thought it over for about fifteen seconds as she looked into both her boyfriend's and then Susan's eyes. "Let's see how resolute she is, shall we? We'll duel. Harry, you referee. No Unforgivable curses, fight until one is either unconscious or surrenders – that's it." Harry silently backed into the wall to observe the fight.

"What?" exclaimed Susan. "I..."

"If you don't want to join us, just say so."

"It's not that. Just I..."

"Need to draw your wand if you don't want to go down without a fight."

Reluctantly, the girl complied, determined to prove herself."

"Ready," said Harry. "One, two, three, begin."

A fraction of a second after Harry announced it, Susan felt a curse hit her foot and she fell. When she saw her opponent still pointing her wand, she rolled over, barely escaping the next hex. As she scrambled to her feet, she noticed that her left foot was bleeding and sore. She pointed her wand at Hermione. "Stupefy!"

Hermione silently raised a shield that easily blocked the spell and sent a hex that broke Susan's right leg, sending the girl back to the floor. "Is that the spell you want to hit the Shadow with? A stunner?" She shot several stinging hexes at Susan, who refused to acknowledge her pain as she glared at her opponent. "Do you think Snape won't revive her? Or do you plan to stun both?" she mocked.

"They'll go to jail!" Susan shot back.

"Umbridge has been there. Didn't help! That Dumb-Old-Dork controlling the Wizengamot would keep Snape out no matter what he does, giving him a second chance to hurt people like you!" She shot another spell – this one breaking Susan's left arm.

"Reducto!" screamed Susan, landing a spell on the surprised girl's right hand, causing her to drop her wand. The Hufflepuff relaxed and looked at her bleeding foot before getting kicked in the head, knocked unconscious.

"Did you have to be that vicious, Hermione?" asked Harry, irritated.

"Yes, I did. If she can't use lethal curses, we don't want her to fight with us. Plus, we had to make sure she doesn't surrender easily."

"I think she already proved that while she was a prisoner," argued Harry.

"That's different than in battle."

Ignoring that comment, Harry quickly began healing Susan's wounds while Hermione healed her own. Once all her injuries were taken care of, Harry woke the Hufflepuff girl.

"Are you alright? Hermione was a bit too..."

"I'm fine, Harry." She turned to Hermione. "I understand the lessons you taught me, but I didn't enjoy the class. I'll never hesitate to use powerful curses in a fight and never turn my back on a conscious opponent."

"Good," replied Hermione, before offering the girl her hand to help her up. "I am sorry I was so hard on you, but the people we fight are..."

"I know how vicious the Shadow of Pain is," she interrupted with a dark expression.

Hermione turned to Harry. "First, we need an oath of secrecy from her, and then we teach her Occlumency and Dueling."

--TM--

Over the next few months, Harry and Hermione began training Susan rigorously, making it a point not to reveal anything about the Room of Requirement, Chamber of Pac Man, their Time-Turner, and especially their Time-Meddling. However, she didn't openly hang out with them, so neither Neville nor Hannah (Susan's best friend) knew anything about that arrangement.

At the same time, the aurors weren't getting any closer to capturing Umbridge, although more disappearances had occurred and Kingsley had been informed by one of his other contacts that the Shadow had begun recruiting. He shared that information both with his boss and Tox. Amelia Bones had managed to remove every position

Dumbledore held because of his refusal to reveal Snape's whereabouts, including as headmaster, much to the surprise of all, although officially Albus had retired.

The fact that a man Dumbledore had protected and kept as a teacher for so long had participated in the capture and torture of a student gave her the momentum to go even further than Fudge had been able to in the other timeline. Anything he had to say about Snape actually spying was ignored once Susan had testified about Severus' participation in her torment. Still, the old man did manage to stay out of jail by calling in every favor he'd acquired over the years. Rumor had it that he was reviving the Order of the Phoenix to combat the Shadow, but Harry was the last person who would be told about that. McGonagall was acting Headmistress until the end of the school year, although she had made it clear that she did not want the position to become permanent.

--TM--

"Is everything in place, Severus?" He and his boss were at their new headquarters – another abandoned warehouse under the Fidelius charm.

"Yes, Shadow. Our operative will steal one next week."

"Only ONE!?" yelled Dolores Umbridge, whose very name came from the Latin roots of 'pain' and 'shadow' respectively. She pointed her wand at Snape, intent to torture him.

"Yes, Mistress," he replied defensively. "If an accident occurs where they're kept and one is missing, no one will think anything of it. However, if several disappear, then everyone will know what we're planning, and prepare accordingly..."

"Making it a useless gesture," she completed, before reaching for her pink cup and sipping her tea. "Very well. We shall have to content ourselves with one of that particular weapon. It is too bad they are so rare and mature so slowly. Very well."

"If that is all, I'll be going. The old fool is waiting for his false report."  
He turned to leave.

"Hem, hem!"

He stopped in his tracks and turned. "Yes, Shadow?"

Calmly, she reminded him, "See that nothing ruins this plan. I will not tolerate another failure." She giggled. "If you do fail, I have the perfect ritual for you to participate in." Another giggle. "Good day, Severus."

--TM—

Easter Break had just begun and many students, including Harry, Hermione and Susan, were staying at the castle for the holiday break. That trio was now standing in Moaning Myrtle's bathroom and fortunately the ghost wasn't in there at that moment.

"Why are we, especially you, Harry, here?" the Hufflepuff asked. They'd basically had her follow them there without revealing the destination after instructing her to bring a shrunken broom in her purse.

"Because you've learned enough Occlumency that we feel we can trust you with some of our secrets," replied Harry as he pulled a small globe out of his pocket. "Here. This is a thought sphere where a memory is recorded." He held it out and Susan took it.

"What's it for?"

Hermione instructed her to, "Hold it in front of this sink and tap it with your wand."

The girl obeyed and looked frightened as she saw a small snake speak Parseltongue, causing the sinks to separate, revealing a large hole. Harry had given her a memory of himself as Tox opening the entrance. He explained, "This is the way into our headquarters, the legendary Chamber of Secrets."



While Susan Bones was learning about the Chamber (she laughed her head off at the Pac Man images that had replaced Salazar's original decorations), Animagus forms and the Time-Turner, there was a disturbance in one of the greenhouses. When Professor Sprout discovered the problem, it appeared that there had been a small fire and a few of her plants had been destroyed. She couldn't tell who or what caused the fire.

--TM—

It was about a week before school would be let out, and Diagon Alley was crowded as usual. It was exactly noon in and it was a beautiful day. The sun was out and many witches and wizards, along with their pre-Hogwarts children, were out doing their shopping, when something appeared unnoticed in the middle of the street. It was a type of magical plant, although it looked like an adult midget with shrubbery growing out of its head. Attached to it was a note that simply read, 'Courtesy of the Shadow.' The plant let out a loud scream.

--TM--

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

I was honestly surprised that no reviewer ever mentioned the meaning of Umbridge's name in the HPLex dot org website. Here's what they say about her name:

"dolor" = Latin for pain, sadness, grief, resentment.

"umbrage" = offense, from Latin "umbra" shade, shadow, ghost.

## Chapter Twenty-Six – Attack!

Shadow Attacks in Diagon Alley - Twenty-Five Dead – Twenty-Three wounded

By Anna Jesse

Yesterday at noon things were peaceful in Diagon Alley. Families were out doing their shopping. Mothers were pushing their babies along in strollers. A small plant was portkeyed into this common scene, turning it into a nightmare. A fully-mature mandrake got up and began to scream. Many of you will remember from Herbology that the mandrake's cry is fatal to all who hear it. There were twenty-five people, nearly half of them children, who were close enough to find out that fact for themselves. Twenty-three people who weren't close enough to get the full blast of it were also affected. Some of them have lost their hearing and others their minds. When the aurors were finally able to enter the area, after the mandrake had been silenced, they found a note that read, 'Courtesy of the Shadow.'

Those of you who have been keeping up with the news will recall that the Shadow is none other than Delores Umbridge, who...

"How could she?" asked Hermione as she dropped the Daily Prophet to the table. There were tears in her eyes as she looked at her companion.

"A magical weapon of mass destruction," commented Harry miserably as he picked up the paper and skimmed the article that had silenced most of the Great Hall minutes after the mail arrived. "...Crueler than the Dark Lord and twice as foul..." he quoted from the prophecy Luna had made so long ago. He took a deep breath before saying, "I've lost my appetite," and got up.

"Me, too." Neither noticed that most of the other students left as well. It's difficult to eat breakfast after learning news like that. It was fortunate that the final exams had been completed the week before and they were only waiting this last week for their grades, because not many people would've been in the mood for classes.

Harry and Hermione wordlessly walked to Moaning Myrtle's bathroom, only stopping to make sure no one was watching when Harry entered. He transformed into Tox and hissed, "Open."

--TM--

It was about a minute after the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets was closed that Susan Bones entered the bathroom. She'd seen her friends/trainers get up after reading the paper and was fairly certain where they were going. To make it not as obvious, she waited until the others left the Hall and told her Hufflepuff friends that she wanted to be alone, knowing they'd always given her space to deal with reminders of her ordeal with the Shadow in private. She pulled out the thought sphere the Time-Meddlers had given her and activated it, opening the sink.

She followed the Chamber until it led to what they were calling the Hall of Pac Man, based off the new decorations. When she got that door open, she heard Harry's voice say, "It's all my fault! Why did I have to do it? If I hadn't, then none of those people would've died! Susan wouldn't have been..."

"Hello, Susan," interrupted Hermione, who was facing the door. Her face held a guarded expression. Harry turned around after a moment, and the Bones girl could tell he'd been crying, even though he'd wiped his eyes before turning.

Not seeing any other option, she asked the natural question. "What did you do, Harry, that makes this your fault?"

He took a deep breath. "I...I told you that I broke into the Ministry to get the Time-Turner." Susan nodded but said nothing. "I...didn't tell you what happened while I was there. I met Umbridge and wound up stunning her." He sighed. "I could've left her like that, but I didn't. I, I made it look like she'd gotten drunk and broke the Time-Turners. I thought it was funny. I'm the reason she went to Azkaban, the reason she went mad..."

"The reason she became the Shadow," Susan finished softly as Harry's head hung down. She was silently staring at him for a few

moments before saying, "No wonder you're so determined to fight her." Hermione stood silently watching the both of them while Harry stared at the floor.

"I'm sorry, Susan. I never meant for..."

"I don't blame you, Harry. You didn't tell that monster to kidnap me or kill those people! It's just as easy to blame Fudge or my aunt for not listening to her pleas of innocence. It's just as easy to blame the whole system that uses Dementors as guards. However, Umbridge made her choice to be evil long before that happened. I've spent a lot of time with her. She enjoys torturing people. No one will convince me that she wouldn't have tortured others if she hadn't gone to prison." Harry looked up at her in shock. "What? Did you expect me to yell at you and agree that you should be the one to go to prison for her crimes?"

"No, I...I don't know how I expected you to react. I...guess I'm just horrified by what happened. Even Voldemort didn't kill that many people at once."

"I know it sounds morbid," commented Hermione grimly, "but it could've been a lot worse if she'd put a Sonorus charm on the mandrake."

"I suppose," agreed Harry. "The main thing is that we've got to figure out a way to stop her from doing something like that again."

--TM--

Elsewhere, the Shadow of Pain and the Half-blood Prince were celebrating the panic they'd started with the attack. The wireless had announced that half the shops in Diagon Alley had closed out of fear of another assault.

"We need to use this fear to our advantage," declared Umbridge. "Severus, call our new recruits! We can storm a mudblood home, killing the parents while their kids are still at school!"

"I know just the mudblood," replied Snape with a grin. Suddenly, Snape's expression changed and he looked at his watch, which appeared to be a normal, black analog one, but the time was set at exactly noon, despite the fact that it was about 10 a.m. "Dumbledore wants a meeting," he told the Shadow. "No doubt he's upset about our triumph yesterday and wants me to explain."

While sipping from a pink cup of tea, Delores grinned. "We could use this to our advantage. Tell the old fool that you had no prior knowledge of that attack and you think I've gone too far, and lead him here."

He grinned as he adjusted the time on his watch, signaling Dumbledore when they'd meet at the designated safe house.

--TM--

That night, Adam and Marissa Granger were snuggled together on their couch alternating between watching a movie and snogging when they were interrupted by a loud ringing that they'd heard once before – when Harry and Hermione were demonstrating wards they'd set up.

"That's the magical alarm, isn't it?" asked Marissa as a panicked expression came over her face.

Adam nodded as he got up, rushing toward the window. He pulled back the curtain just in time to be hit with a spell. He fell back unconscious as his wife watched in horror. His ear had been sliced off and a large piece of glass was in his right eye. He was screaming in agony when they heard a cruel feminine voice calmly state, "So shall it be done to everyone who brings a mudblood into this world."

Glass from a different window shattered, calling Marissa's attention to it. She thought she was seeing things as flames took the shape of creatures as they set the house on fire. She was now officially in a state of panic.

Adam weakly said, "Cabinet," as he stood up, clearly in a lot of pain. The glass was still in his eye. "Come on."

More Fiendfyre was shot into the house as the couple made their way into the room they'd set up Harry's vanishing cabinet in. Marissa opened the door as the flames were approaching and shut it tight. A moment later, the sounds of burning and taunts were gone as they exited inside Harry's trunk. Marissa helped her husband onto a couch as she asked, "How do we let Harry know we're in here?"

--TM--

After Snape watched the Granger roof cave in, he told the Shadow, "It's time for my appointment with Dumbledore."

"I'll be ready for him in ten minutes," she replied with a grin before ordering everyone to leave.

--TM--

Harry and Hermione were in the library when his watch/trunk vibrated. "Someone's just entered my trunk," he whispered to Hermione.

"It has to be my parents," she replied, knowing that they had the matching cabinet to the one inside. "I have a bad feeling about this."

"Come on," he said as he got up, intent on finding a place to enter the trunk to see what was going on.

--TM--

Adam and Marissa hadn't been inside the trunk for five minutes when they were joined by Harry and Hermione. She screamed when she saw the condition her father was in while Harry rushed forward.

"What happened?" he asked while Hermione approached. While Marissa explained how they'd been attacked, Hermione put her studies to good use, applying healing spells to her father.

After she'd vanished the glass and stopped the bleeding of both Adam's eye and ear, she said, "I don't know how to regrow either. Maybe we can take him to St. Mungo's."

“Can they do that?” asked Harry. “I would think they’d have healed Mad-Eye better if they could.”

“Good point,” replied Hermione, trying to stay calm. “I think you’d be better off at a muggle hospital, where they could use plastic surgery, than at St. Mungo’s.”

“Besides, Umbridge may have spies there,” commented Harry. “It’s probably better if they think you’re dead.” He then asked, “Adam, did you see how many people attacked you?”

“I saw at least a dozen of them during the moment I was watching.”

--TM--

“Albus,” Snape said as he approached the man who’d kept him out of Azkaban for years. “It has gone too far.”

“Why didn’t you stop that attack? Children were killed!”

“I didn’t know about it until after it happened, I swear. The Shadow obviously didn’t trust me enough to tell me. She must’ve seen how much I regretted what happened to the Bones girl.”

“Perhaps,” agreed Albus. “It must be difficult for you.”

“Yes it is, but I’m through with it. I think we should attack her now. I know we can win. She’s supposed to be alone at this very minute.”

Dumbledore pulled his wand. “Then let’s go, my friend.”

--TM--

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

Sorry about the short chapter and the long wait for it. I’ve been busy lately, but I’m trying to get to a normal updating schedule.

## Chapter Twenty-Seven – Avada Kedavra

Standing side-by-side, two wizards appeared in front of a supposedly abandoned warehouse in a bad part of muggle London. One had long, white hair with a beard to match. He was wearing half-moon spectacles, along with flamboyantly colored robes. His wand was in his right hand and pointing straight forward. At his side was a much younger man in his forties with black, greasy hair and black robes. His wand was also facing forward.

“The Shadow hasn’t had time to cast the Fidelius on this warehouse yet, but is planning to do so later today, so this is our only chance.”

“I hope that she is alone as you’ve been told, Severus,” the older man replied as he began to silently remove the many other wards that were guarding their destination. “I’d hate for others to be unnecessarily hurt.” Dumbledore believed that once the leader was gone, the followers would stop committing crimes, which is why he had had no problem with ninety percent of the Death Eaters evading Azkaban and walking free for a decade before someone began killing them.

“I do wonder if Delores is luring me into a trap,” Snape responded, sounding concerned.

“If she is, then it’s time we sprang that trap. The wards are down.” He pointed his wand at the nearby door and it opened for them. “Let’s go.”

The two figures walked into the dimly-lit warehouse with several cobwebs all over the ceiling. In the center of the gloomy place was a desk with a woman dressed in all pink sitting at it, apparently working on parchmentwork.

“Stupefy!” whispered Dumbledore, sending a red beam of light toward Umbridge. The only problem was that the beam went straight through the figure and into the desk.

Suddenly, bright lights were turned on and an annoying, “Hem, hem,” could be heard behind them. They turned to see the real Shadow,



along with fifteen of her followers, wands pointed at them. "That was quite rude to walk in here and try to attack me. Shame on you," she scolded them as though they were little children. "Severus, I can't say I'm surprised at your bad behavior. Now, I'm afraid that both you and Mr. Dumbledore must be punished."

At that pronouncement, the fifteen wizards with Umbridge began firing Avada Kedavra's. Albus flicked his wand, causing a large granite stone to appear, blocking every one of the green spells. At that moment, ten more jumped out of hiding places, surrounding Albus and Severus, all shooting various dark spells which Dumbledore blocked. The Shadow conjured a large panther that leapt toward them, but Snape sent a, "Sectumsemptra!" at the large cat's head. It was dead before it hit the ground.

One by one Dumbledore stupefied and bound each of Umbridge's followers while Snape himself countered everything she shot at them. When there were about five minions left, Snape shot a silent Stupefy at Umbridge, knocking her to the ground while Albus formed a magical rope that knocked her remaining servants to the ground.

"It's over," said Dumbledore while magically binding his opponents, turning his back on his long-time friend.

"Thank goodness," agreed Severus before whispering the words, "Avada Kedavra!" with his wand about one foot from Dumbledore's back. The green beam of light hit the old man, instantly sending him to the floor, dead. "I don't think I could've stood one more day listening to your talk of goodness. Just because I hate the former Dark Lord doesn't mean I don't hate you, too."

--TM--

Aside from a few people rushing about to purchase essential items, Diagon Alley was empty, despite the fact that it was about noon on a beautiful day. Those who were shopping were obviously nervous because it hadn't been long since the Shadow's vicious attack with a mandrake, killing far too many innocents. It was therefore perfectly understandable that everyone in the streets Apparated on the spot when someone appeared right in front of the Alley's entrance and fell.

This corpse did not contain any traps, but there was no way for the shopkeepers nor their customers to know that. That is the reason why nobody still in the Alley admitted to even having seen the body until the bricks were opened up for an eleven-year-old muggle-born witch and her parents, getting their first taste of the Wizarding world.

The girl looked at Dumbledore's body and screamed before running back into the Leaky Cauldron. "Is this your idea of a joke?" yelled her father at Professor Sprout, who was helping them get acquainted with her world after informing them of the existence of magic.

"I assure you that this is no joke," she said while gazing into the dead eyes of her former employer. "In fact, this man used to be the headmaster of Hogwarts before he retired."

At that moment, Tom the bartender ran up and looked. A few tears fell from his eyes before he declared, "I guess the Shadow even got him. I'll owl the Ministry." It was at that moment that Sprout realized there was a note attached to Albus' robes.

To whom it may concern,

Retired Headmaster Dumbledore has simply refused to mind his own business, sticking his crooked nose where it didn't belong. Therefore, I was forced to help him return to his retirement. I certainly hope I won't have to help anyone else retire. Mr. Dumbledore was bad, so he had to be punished. If you'll be good, you might not have to be punished.

Courtesy of the Shadow

By the time the father of the muggle-born girl learned who the Shadow was from others in the pub, he decided that his child was not entering that world nor attending Hogwarts, a decision she wholeheartedly agreed with. "Come on, Romilda," he said. "Let's go home."

--TM--

The death of Dumbledore seemed to be the only thing the students at Hogwarts could discuss from the time the article appeared on the front page of the Daily Prophet. He was given a large funeral to which Harry Potter was invited to attend, but the Boy-Who-Lived couldn't bring himself to accept.

"Whenever I think of everything Dumbledore did to me, to the students at Hogwarts by subjecting them to Snape and putting them in danger all the time, and what happened to the world because of his 'great plan' I want to cheer that he's dead," Harry confided to Hermione, "but I know he died trying to fight Umbridge, and that it was four years early because of..."

"You can't keep taking the credit for everything that Umbridge does, Harry!" his girlfriend and confidant interrupted. "Even Susan knows that the Shadow is responsible for her own actions."

"What really bothers me is that when I'm not concentrating on his bad points, I'm neither upset nor happy about this. I'm indifferent to his death."

"As he was apparently indifferent to everyone who had to suffer and die for his plan to succeed."

"Exactly. Am I becoming like him?"

"That depends," replied Hermione. "Are you willing to let half of Britain die to defeat one Dark Lord with a few dozen followers?" Without waiting for a response, she continued, "Are you willing to allow a baby to be raised by abusive relatives that don't want him because you believe he has a role to play in the war with Umbridge? Are you willing to endanger an entire school time and time again as your way of training a child to be a weapon? Are you willing to turn the disciplinary system of the supposed greatest magical school in Europe into a joke for more than fifteen years just to keep an unrepentant murderer out of jail because you think he has a role to play in a war that may or may not happen?"

Harry shook his head. "No. I don't have that kind of obsession. I'm not willing to subject innocent people to suffering and death just to defeat

one crazy dark lord or lady. I'm not a chess master and I don't view people as pawns."

"I wonder if that's the beginning of someone turning dark," Hermione pondered out loud. "If the moment you start viewing people as disposable pawns to sacrifice whenever needed to win your game is when you become dark."

"If that is true," said Harry, "and it makes sense to me, then Dumbledore was a dark lord and didn't even know it." He then added with a grin, "I guess he never heard of games where you simply get the highest score."

--TM--

The ride on the Hogwarts Express was uneventful, mainly because Hermione warded their compartment to stop Malfoy or anyone else from coming to harass them. The young couple sat with Neville, Susan and Hannah for the trip. Susan mentioned that Cedric Diggory had told the Hufflepuffs in the defense club that he was planning to bring their training level up the next year to really prepare them to fight people like Umbridge and her minions.

The next day, Mr. Granger was being admitted into a muggle hospital in Ireland, under the name Richard Donavan, to be given plastic surgery to deal with the wounds he'd recently incurred. It was a simple matter to persuade the hospital staff that he had all his paperwork with him, once the appropriate forms had been conjured. He would also be getting a glass eye that matched his other one perfectly. His wife would stay with him constantly, while Harry and Hermione got back to the house they were renting to work on homework.

"Get well," commanded Hermione while she hugged her father goodbye.

"I will. You take care of yourself, young lady."

"The next time I see you," said Harry in jest, "I should be the one with the worst scar. I don't like how you tried to usurp my rightful place."

"I apologize for temporarily holding your position as 'most scarred person' after our attack. It was quite inconsiderate of me."

"I'm glad you realize the error of your way and are going to rectify it." At that declaration, the two males started laughing while the females rolled their eyes.

"We'll see you tomorrow," promised Harry before he and his girlfriend left.

"Goodbye," said Marissa.

"I love you," said Hermione just before they were out of sight. She and Harry left the hospital the normal way, then walked to a secluded spot before Apparating straight into their temporary home.

--TM--

Once they arrived at the house, Harry and Hermione climbed into his trunk to begin to practice their fighting. It wasn't precisely what they claimed they'd do, but it was magical work. Harry planned to watch Hermione's memories of the classes they'd decided to attend that he hadn't but wanted to train first. The electives they'd signed up for were Arithmancy, Ancient Runes and Care of Magical Creatures. Harry wondered who the new headmaster, whoever that ended up being, would hire for C of MC since Professor Kettleborn was retiring, but was fairly confident it wouldn't be Hagrid. As fond as Harry was of the half-giant, he had to admit he hadn't been the best teacher of that class, mainly because of his fondness of dangerous animals.

After a few minutes, Susan popped into the trunk with Winky, who'd side-along Apparated her. "Hi, guys," she said. "Am I late?"

"No," replied Harry. "We just got started early." After that, the three practiced fighting with magic for several hours before turning back time so that Susan could get back home while Harry and Hermione actually did work on homework. They would be training as much as they could while trying to locate Delores Umbridge, because they

wanted to end this war before she did something even worse than what she'd already done.

At the same time, many miles away, the Shadow of Pain was planning on doing just that.

--TM--

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

## Chapter Twenty-Eight – Britain Falls Into Shadow

“Well, I guess it’s time,” said Ulysses Sangleton to his partner, Francis Vladamour. Both were mercenary purebloods working for the Shadow. She was able to pay the highest wages around, due to her possession of the Philosopher’s Stone, and therefore was easily able to attract any mercenaries in Europe. However, she did only hire purebloods to be her minions.

The mission they were on was very simple yet important to Umbridge. Throughout the day, several mercenaries had visited the Ministry of Magic under different disguises for different excuses, and had placed certain magical devices at key positions on every floor of the building before disilluioning them. After planting the devices, the mercenaries left, making sure to check out at the front desk.

It was now exactly 2 a.m. on July 3rd, which meant that it was time to enact the plan. All they had to do was activate the devices, which had the Protean charm on them. Once activated, the devices would perform a wide-area-stunner, knocking everyone near them unconscious, to be sorted out later after interrogation by the Shadow.

Obviously, not every single person in the building would happen to be in the right place to be stunned, so the mercenaries would storm the building immediately afterward, killing anyone who tried to interfere with this takeover. The next morning, the majority of Ministry employees would find out their work environment had changed.

Ulysses took his wand out, pointed it at the control device, and muttered the activation phrase a moment before flooing into the Ministry building, followed by his partner. As they began running toward the elevator, others began appearing in the many floor entrances. After determining that the few people on that floor had been stunned, as many mercenaries as could fit into the elevator entered it while the others, a hundred in total, took the stairs.

It didn’t take long for them to locate and kill the people who had been out of range at the time, as there weren’t very many. A few had been in the bathroom at the time while others had been walking between departments, but were quickly subdued. The skeleton crew that

stayed at the Ministry in the middle of the night was small as it was, but with ninety percent of them unconscious, it was an easy takeover. All the stunned employees were put into cells where their loyalty would be determined by the new boss when she arrived. They'd either join her or die.

--TM--

The next morning, Minister Amelia Bones woke up in her bed as usual, got ready for work and had breakfast with Susan. After saying goodbye and wishing her niece a good day, she Apparated into the atrium of the Ministry building.

The sight that greeted Amelia was not what she expected. She saw no less than fifty strangers, all of whom had their wands out. As people flooded into the place, they were immediately stunned. It was only her years of experience as an Auror that alerted her to the fact that a red beam of light was headed her way. She shifted to the right just in time to avoid it as she pulled out her wand, silently stunning the guard who'd attacked her.

"It's her! The former Minister!" one of the Shadow's mercenaries shouted while Bones tried to Apparate out, quickly learning that wards were up that didn't allow people to leave. She barely managed to dodge a green beam of light as she formulated an escape plan. Obviously, they were stunning the normal employees, hoping to make recruits out of them, but she was wanted dead. Amelia's mind fixed on the visitor's entrance, the one that didn't require magical means of travel. If she could get there, she might be able to escape.

Moving faster than one would expect a woman of her age to do, she started running, while shooting reducto's over her shoulder for cover. From the sound of things, she'd hit at least one of them as she kept changing her position so she wouldn't be easily shot. When she got to her destination, she turned around, shooting about ten reducto's at the mercenaries before jumping into the fake phone booth and dialing the numbers to be taken to the street.

She had her wand ready and blasted her way out of the phone booth, exploding it to pieces and killing the five mercenaries waiting for her



when she arrived, before they knew what had hit them. She Apparated away before anyone else could attack her.

--TM--

“Auntie, what are you doing back? Did you forget something?” asked Susan as Amelia Bones reappeared at their home less than five minutes after she’d left.

“The Ministry’s been taken over, come with me!” She grabbed her niece and Apparated away mere seconds before some of the Shadow’s people arrived outside to destroy the house.

Susan looked around at their new location, recognizing it immediately. “What are we doing at Hogwarts?”

“Right now it’s the best defended location in Britain.”

--TM--

Harry and Hermione were doing something they rarely did these days – relaxing. They’d gotten up early and decided to talk. They planned to start exercising in a few minutes, but for the moment, they were just enjoying each other’s company while sitting together on a love seat.

“So,” said Harry, “this year we’ll officially start dating.”

“Not until at least after your birthday. Once you’re thirteen then it should be acceptable.”

“But what difference does a few weeks make?” he argued playfully. “I’m not any different now than I will be then.” He scooted closer to her and whispered in her ear. “Besides, you know how old I really am.”

“I know, but for appearances sake...”

“Come on, Hermione. I think we’ve waited long enough. You keep getting more and more beautiful each day, and I know how gorgeous you’ll end up. You know I love you.”

“I know,” she said softly.

“And you do love me, don’t you?”

“You know I do.” He put his arm around her and leaned closer, making her feel light-headed. “I suppose it won’t hurt to start a little early,” she said before leaning forward and kissing him passionately.

POP! A loud noise filled the room.

The couple sprung apart to see Susan Bones and Winky, who presumably had brought her. Susan had decided to see them as soon as she and her aunt had settled at Hogwarts, where the government-in-exile was being set up. It would also be a refuge. While Amelia was contacting every Ministry employee she could find, Susan decided to break the news to her trainers and rescuers. The girl found herself relieved to have some reason to be happy on this terrible day. She smirked at the young couple who’d been snogging a moment before. “It’s about time.”

“What?” they asked together.

“I’m glad you’ve finally admitted your feelings. It’s been obvious for ages.”

Smiling brightly, Harry replied, “Yes, we have, and I couldn’t be happier.”

“Me, neither,” agreed Hermione, who found herself a bit relieved to be able to show her affection for Harry as she put her arm around him. “Did you want to join us for our workout?”

After taking a deep breath, she responded, “Sure, but first I have terrible news.”

The young couple's expressions changed from happiness to concern immediately. "What's happened?"

"The Shadow took over the Ministry. Auntie barely made it back from work alive. She's using Hogwarts as the new base."

"What?!?"

--TM--

Later that day, this message from the Shadow could be heard across England through the Wizarding Wireless Network.

"Hem hem. Upstanding citizens of Britain who hold to traditional values, I have wonderful news for you. The radicals, who had taken over our government, forcing us to accept uppity mudbloods in our workplaces and schools, have been defeated. No longer will you have to work side-by-side with those of impure blood. No longer will we have muggle values brought into our world by those enemies of tradition.

This victory brings with it opportunities for proper witches and wizards to prosper under new leadership that understands the value of proper upbringing. We will no longer have to compete with the mudbloods who have been favored by the former government, which means there are far more jobs available. Society will be restored to the way it was in the golden age of Howarts' founders, where time-honored ideals reigned supreme.

It is unfortunate that the Hogwarts castle itself is currently in the hands of traitors to those values, but that will be rectified soon enough. For now, it is time for you to declare your allegiance to the long-established ways and let us know of any mudbloods infesting your area. We suspect that they have been somehow stealing magic from pureblood children, turning them into squibs, and wish to determine how they're doing it. For that purpose, we have established housing for them, where we can do proper research into this matter.

It is a time to celebrate – tradition has finally won the war!

--TM--

Within a week, Hogwarts, which was being left alone while the Shadow established her rule and grew her army, had truly become a functional Ministry-in-Exile. It didn't have all the amazing magical devices that the actual Ministry building enjoyed, but Headmistress McGonagall made sure that functional offices had been set up on the first floor for the most important departments. In addition to that, the castle began serving as a refuge for everyone fleeing the Shadow, who'd created concentration camps that sounded worse than Azkaban for muggle-borns and any others who resisted her that weren't immediately killed. Susan couldn't remember the castle ever being this full. Not surprisingly, Draco Malfoy and his goons had joined the Shadow's group.

Unfortunately, those that did join the government-in-exile did at least as much harm as good. Many of the Wizengamot members who'd arrived at the castle were hindering Minister Bones' making plans to take back the government with their constant complaining about the accommodations. She knew they were used to living in mansions, but thought they were grown-up enough to adapt to the situation.

Harry and Hermione were staying in Ireland, although they did meet Susan every day via house elf express, but it seemed that every other family had fled to the castle. Cedric Diggory arrived with his mother after they found out his father had been killed when he refused to join Umbridge. He immediately restarted the DA secretly with every student at the castle, training them without the adults knowing. Susan clearly remembered the first meeting of the summer. Cedric gave a speech that motivated them all.

"The adults say that we're too young to fight, but I say different! We're not too young to be victims. We're not too young to lose our families. Why are we too young to resist the Shadow?"

"She wants us to be helpless victims that she can kill at the drop of a hat. The adults seem to want the same thing, though for different reasons. They don't seem to realize that we don't want to wait around

while they decide our fate. We want to fight this war! We want to win this war!"

He then started teaching them a lot more lethal spells than any D.A. meeting had ever had demonstrated before. It was because of this that Susan decided to suggest to Harry and Hermione that they let the Defense Association fight with them.

--TM--

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

CHP30